NF

ISSUE #74:
THE BOND BETWEEN
BROTHERS

DRAGON QUEST III:
HD-2D REMAKE

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA:
ECHOES OF WISDOM

CASTLEVANIA
DOMINUS COLLECTION

SNOW BROS.
WONDERLAND

RIVER CITY GIRLS 2:
DOUBLE DRAGON DLC

EMIO - THE SMILING MAN:
FAMICOM DETECTIVE CLUB

DONKEY KONG
COUNTRY RETURNS HD

AN INTERVIEW WITH
THE VIAN BROTHERS

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES:
SPLINTERED FATE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES:
MUTANTS UNLEASHED

CASTAWAY

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM FIGHTING COLLECTION:
ARCADE CLASSICS

THE MAKING OF
THE IMPACT OF IWATA

NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER 2024

NES ENDINGS CAMPAIGN COMES TO AN END

KICKSTARTER HAS BEEN kind for a second time as we continue NF Publishing's expansion beyond just making magazines and into the world of books. The crowdfunding campaign for NES Endings Compendium: Volume 2 has come to its conclusion, with positive results!

This Kickstarter's funding goal was set to $19,900, but early backers pushed the pledge total past that mark just four days after the campaign went live. Support continued to pour in all the way until the final day, October 10, at which time we crossed the finish line with a final total of $45,775 raised and 1,055 total backers!

I'm left feeling encouraged, and thankful. NF didn't have anything to do with the creation or publishing of Volume 1 in author Rey Esteban's NES Endings Compendium series last year, but he reached out and asked for help with making this sequel a reality when other avenues for bringing it to his fans presented roadblocks to his progress. I'm happy that we were able to step in and assist him, thanks in large part to the willingness of our own fans to continue to support unique and interesting coverage of the world of video games in print form. (And so many of the games that launched on the NES throughout 1990 were absolute masterpieces – it was such a defining year both in Nintendo history and my own childhood that when Rey said it would be the subject of this book, I really had to say yes to helping out!)

If you missed the Kickstarter, keep an eye on NFMagazine.com. We'll have a few spare copies to sell there! **— LUCAS**

Our third NF Book is already in the works too. Stay tuned!

ISSUE #74:
THE BOND BETWEEN
BROTHERS

CONTENTS

INBOX
4

NEWS
8

DOWNLOAD
14

COMICS
7, 29, 42,
56, 64 & 81

FEATURES
30

PREVIEWS
43

RETRO
57

INTERVIEW
61

REVIEWS
65

COMMUNITY
78

NEXT ISSUE
82

68

43

72

52

30

16

76

47

24

61

66

78

ON THE COVER

This time, Mario's going maritime! He once soared through space on a ship shaped like his head, but in Mario & Luigi: Brothership he'll be sailing the seven seas on a ship shaped like an island. (And it's called Shipshape Island!) What kind of challenges will meet with our heroes out on the open water – and have the developers of this new, unexpected sixth entry in the Mario & Luigi series overcome the challenge of that brand having been declared dead for the last half a decade? Find out more inside this issue!

NOVEMBER/
DECEMBER 2024

INBOX

OH BROTHER

Scheduling has become a constant struggle.

Who's going to play first? How *long* is he going to play? What game is he going to pick, and when he's done, who will be the next in line? Rinse and repeat the process for every one of the siblings, then pause only long enough to sleep and wake up the next day to the same questions being asked yet again.

As I continuously remind our readers in our issues, my primary job is not "magazine editor" – it's Dad. Of five boys! And while being a father to five different sons is a challenge (especially when it comes to passing final judgment on the video game play schedule), the even more complicating factor is the fact that, with five boys, there are *dozens* of different father/son combinations to juggle!

The math of it all threatens to break my brain, but I know it's true just from our day-to-day experience – the dynamic is always different depending on which of the boys is present and who is not. And when it comes to playing video games, or just being there to watch as I play a video game myself, it's become contentious. They all want to be present to see me play a new game like The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom. (Which is understandable, but not always practical.) Then they want their own game times, and Carter sometimes doesn't want an onlooking audience of little brothers as he embarks on his own adventures, and Cooper will get upset if he doesn't get to milk every minute of his allowed screen time, and Colson will wail if anyone plays for even the briefest bit before he's seated to see it all, and . . . you get the idea.

But! It's not always a struggle. It is, often, a joy.

These boys' frustrating fraternity often gives rise to genuine beauty. Just the other day I walked into our TV room to see all five of the boys sitting together, cheering uproariously for Chance, our littlest who just turned 2. They had handed him an unconnected old controller and turned on Super Mario Maker 2, queueing up some of those "Auto-Mario" levels where you don't actually have to press any buttons for the stage to complete itself. And the bigger boys were clapping and yelling and making Chance believe that he was the one in control, that he was playing absolutely perfectly and that he was being the best Mario player there ever was! It was a little deceptive, sure. But his little toddler smile was immense – he felt so happy, and so loved and supported by his big bros.

This issue of NF celebrates the simultaneous split between and support among siblings. Brothers can be brutal to one another! But brothers can also be the best of friends. With a brand-new Mario & Luigi game sailing our way soon, there's no better time to explore the intersection between video games and the bonds of brotherhood.

(Or "brothership!")

Lucas M Thomas

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #73:
SEPTEMBER/
OCTOBER 2024

A hearty "hello!" and perhaps also a "welcome back!" to many of you, as we've seen a jump in our subscriber numbers recently, so many of you may have had Issue #73 as your first NF experience, and you're now diving into your second issue. Or maybe this is your first! Or maybe this is your 74th!! Regardless, welcome. Thanks for being a part of the Force!

In the Player's Poll last time, we asked you to identify which brothers in video games you think are the best. Secondly, we polled for the past popularity of the Mario & Luigi RPG series, asking if you've ever played any of the earlier installments, and, if so, which one was your favorite? Finally, we called upon your creativity: If Mario and Luigi had another brother, what would his name be, and what would he look like? Here's what some of you who submitted responses had to say:

LETTERS

The first brothers that came to mind as the best, beyond the obvious choice of Mario and Luigi, of course, are the brothers from the indie game Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons (Naia & Naiee, which I may or may not have had to look up). The game does such a great job telling a story and showing you aspects of their brotherhood all through mechanics and animation, without any dialogue. Plus if you know, you know. Perhaps it's not so surprising the game depicts the sibling bond so well, given its name.

I've played a few of the Mario & Luigi RPG games, though not all. My favourite is easily Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga – it stands head and shoulders above the others for me. It's so full of personality, and made me laugh out loud so many times! I actually like the shorter play time too, because as a big fan of RPGs there are more than enough long ones to go around. Top 5 GBA game!

Mario and Luigi are both classic Italian names and they're next to each other in the alphabet. Sticking to that theme, it seems only right to go with Nicholo (Nicho/Nico for short). Almost every color is already on display in the main cast, so I think it would make the most sense for his hat and shirt to be like an azure blue color. (Darker than Rosalina's dress, but lighter than the bros' overalls.) He'd be the youngest brother and be a little shorter and heavier than Mario (but not so much as Wario). He could idolize Luigi so that while Luigi is always playing the foil to Mario, he still gets to have someone looking up to him. **– ALEX ST. LOUIS**

Luigi getting a supporter is perfect!

I think Larty could be the third brother, and I imagine him to be a mix of Mario and Luigi together: tall like Luigi, with Mario's 'stache and the color light brown (as a mix of red and green). On his cap, an L and an M will appear (for "Larty Mario"). The boots, gloves and overalls stay the same! **– LODU**

I'll go with a more recent set of brothers: Clive and Joshua Rosfield from Final Fantasy XVI. They protect each other from harm time and time again, going through shared trials that lead to some of the most raw, emotional moments I've seen in games. It's an unbreakable bond!

The only Mario & Luigi game I've played in full is the original Superstar Saga, but it was an unforgettable experience. Fawful's huge grin and his mouthy jetpack to match? Terrifying. And that little dance the brothers do as they wait for you to select a move in battle? Iconic.

Mario and Luigi want you to meet their other brother, Romeo! Our third protagonist sports a matching outfit in blue with the same dashing moustache, but he is even taller and skinnier than Luigi. Pencil-thin. In fact, Romeo is *so* skinny that when he jumps in the 2D platformers, his aerodynamic body shoots off-screen and you don't get him back for the next 12 seconds. **– GRAY**

My personal favorite set of video game bros has to be Oscar, Boyd and Rolf from Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance. It was my first Fire Emblem adventure, and I immediately found these three

"IT'S-A ME, PUGOONY!"

Question #1) Honestly, Mario and Luigi!

Question #2) Mario & Luigi: Supestar Saga

Question #3) His name is Pugoony. He throws pizzas to attack, he runs a pizzeria, and he's best, best friends with Toad! **— JUDAH & ASHER KAUHANE, AGES 10 & 8**

Brilliant. Beautiful. I have no notes!

Submissions like this make me realize that I need to ask for art submissions more often. I got such a laugh when I opened the email containing this image! The pizza pocket is pure perfection. Of course a Mario Brother would want to carry an extra snack in his overalls when he's off to save the Mushroom Kingdom!

green-haired goobers oddly charming. Plus, they could all come together for a Triangle Attack! It was such a fun discovery for a new fan of the series!

I can't wait for Brothership! I haven't checked in with the Mario & Luigi series since the original GBA title, but I enjoyed that one immensely. "Mustard of Doom" is an inside joke among my friend group to this day.

The Mario Bros., in my mind, actually DO have a third brother already! My husband and I have a theory: His name is Lario, but he didn't join the family business (plumbing/princess saving). Instead, he became a salaryman in the far-off region of Paldea, where he goes by the name . . . Larry! That's right, Larry from Pokémon Scarlet & Violet is actually the younger Mario Brother! (He looks older due to his exhausting work schedule.) **— T. PETRIE**

Hi! I think my favorite pair of brothers from any game would have to be Lucas and Claus from Mother 3. I can't go into great detail without spoiling anything, but I find their individual stories very interesting. Also, their names are anagrams of each other! **— KATIE H.**

Before answering the poll questions, I wanted to highlight how happy I am with Nintendo Force. I was a subscriber to Nintendo Power halfway into the SNES era all the way to the end. It was such a joy to read and I really missed the experience. I discovered you guys thanks to Kit & Krysta and subbed for the last three issues. You perfectly capture the spirit of NP and I intend to stick around for as long as you do. I'm even expanding my sub to two physical issues so I can give one to my 11-year-old nephew moving forward. So thank you and keep up the amazing work! To the questions now.

1) There's a few brothers I like, but if I had to pick only one duo, I'd say Dante and Vergil from the Devil May Cry series. They're both cool on their own, but together, they have a very different rival dynamic that most video game brothers don't have.

2) I've only played the first three Mario & Luigi games (currently working on amending that). Out of those, Bowser's Inside Story was my favorite. I thought it was hilarious, and the dynamics between the brothers and Bowser both in and out of combat were creative and fun.

3) For a third Mario brother, I'd go weird and make him a yellow Koopa Troopa who was adopted into the family. Give him the personality of somebody who tries to overcome his origins so that he can fit in as a Mario brother. His name would be Rocco. **— TEEPU KHAN**

I think the best bros in video games have to be Timmy and Tommy Nook from the Animal Crossing series. They've become quite iconic every time you go into the shop lately for that series, and their dialogue is usually on point.

I have played every game in the Mario & Luigi RPG series, but I've only ever stuck around and beaten the first two games in the series. For the others, I never was able to stay with them for one reason or another, but I've generally liked what I've played. My favorite would have to be the first one, Superstar Saga.

If Mario and Luigi had a third brother, his name would be Kei (continuing the M to L to K line) and he would look something like between Mario and Wario in terms of height and weight, but he would definitely be a more tank kind of brother in terms of power and defense. **— MATTHEW HORKEY**

If Mario and Luigi had a third brother, I think they would actually have an older sister, Nicoletta. In order of age: L, M, N. She would wear overalls with a corresponding shirt and cap almost the same as Mario and Luigi, but her color motif would be white to complement Mario and Luigi's red and green. Put those together and you get the Italian flag. **— PAUL**

I could definitely picture a big sis fitting in!

CARTER'S CORNER

Hi again!

In the new Mario Party, I would like to see a Yoshi's Island-themed board. Everybody would become babies and not roll as high, but they could rent Yoshis to get a better dice block. That would be fun! But I also really like the other new boards too.

Last time I said I was getting Legendaries in the Sword & Shield Max Lair, and now I have every one of them from Gens 1 through 7, except for Ho-oh and Thundurus. I also got a nice non-Legendary: a Shiny Salazzle! (Not to brag.) But seriously, if you catch every Pokémon you find in the time it takes you to get all the Legends, the chance of finding at least one Shiny is really high.

Right now I'm playing Echoes of Wisdom (which is awesome). There are so many different possibilities! It will be fun to see speedruns of it.

Also, if Mario and Luigi had a third brother, he'd be Karigi, who's basically backwards of Luigi: His jump height and speed are a little less than Mario's, but if he runs off a cliff, he keeps going for a second, like the Jet Run badge (without the speed boost).

Quiz Time! What are some of my favorite Echoes in Echoes of Wisdom? Answer next time!

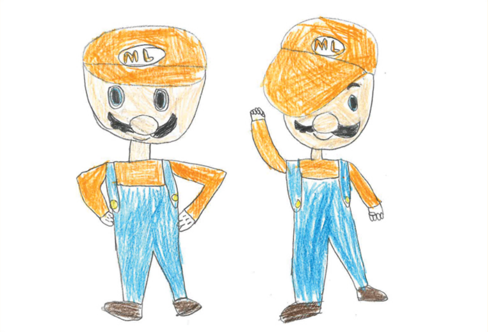
NINTENDO FORCE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Lucas M. Thomas
@NintendoForce

STAFF WRITERS
Jonathan Holmes
@NonTrotski
Maggie Jones Lutey
@AvengerMags
Brett Martin
@NightramVGMM
David Oxford
@LBD_Nytetrayn
Nadia Oxford
@nadiaoxford
Tony Ponce
@megaStryke
Kris Randazzo
@GeekadeKris
Rebecca Rudranath
@jewelryjelly81
Carter Thomas

STAFF ARTISTS
John-Charles Holmes
@Sonic9jct
Lindsey Layne King
@LuminousLungKey
Matthew Loffhagen
@kotorcomics
Matthew Taranto
@MatthewPTaranto
Thor Thorvaldson
@thormeister1971

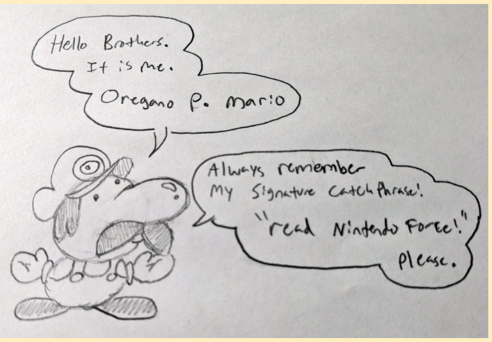
CONTRIBUTORS
Zoey Handley
@adzuken



– "LAMAR" BY ZELDA G.

– "ENZO MARIO" BY JOSH & TRACY JONES

– "MOOIGI" BY KURT PRENGER



– "OREGANO" BY JOSEPH H.

– "GEORGE" BY BINYAMIN A.

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Judah & Asher Kauhane**, the winners of our last Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to three questions about what you think 2025 will bring!

QUESTION #1

Nintendo's next console is just over the horizon . . . but new hardware needs new software! What's a new game you think will be revealed for Switch 2?

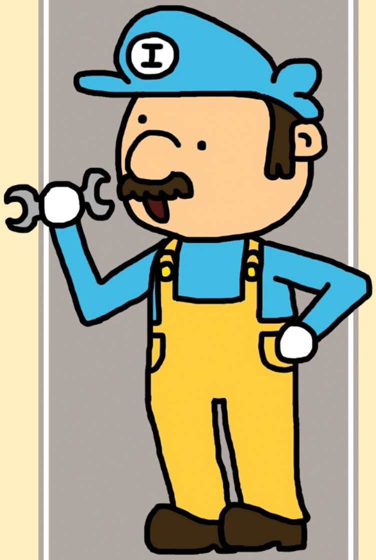
QUESTION #2

Nintendo has been going big on remakes in recent years. Take a shot in the dark and guess which old title will get a remake next!

QUESTION #3

If it were up to you, how would you launch Nintendo's next system? What price would you set? What color choices? How about a pack-in game: yes/no?

Send your responses to **NintendoForceLucas@gmail.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #75" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win the 2025 new release of their choice. (For Switch 1 or Switch 2!)



– "IGNAZIO" BY DANIEL INVERSO

BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

Rise and Shine with Nintendo

This kooky new alarm clock will get your day started with the sounds of your favorite games.

ARE YOU *TRULY* devoted to Mario? Do you sometimes wish that not even a single second of your waking hours would be wasted *not* thinking about The Legend of Zelda? If an in-your-ear reminder of the Big N could help you begin each and every morning of your life, would you eagerly, instantly agree to that? Well, now you can!

Say hello to Alarmo, the quirky new alarm clock from Nintendo that ships equipped with the sights and sounds of several different first-party series, and works to wake you from blissful slumber in the morning with even more blissful video game music and noises. It's the latest oddball product from our favorite wacky company.

At its core, Alarmo is a standard alarm clock: You set the time that you'd like to be awakened, and when that time arrives it will begin to play gentle music to welcome you back to the waking world. You can choose from soundtrack selections drawn out of five different Nintendo titles: Super Mario Odyssey, The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, Ring Fit Adventure, Splatoon 3 and Pikmin 4.

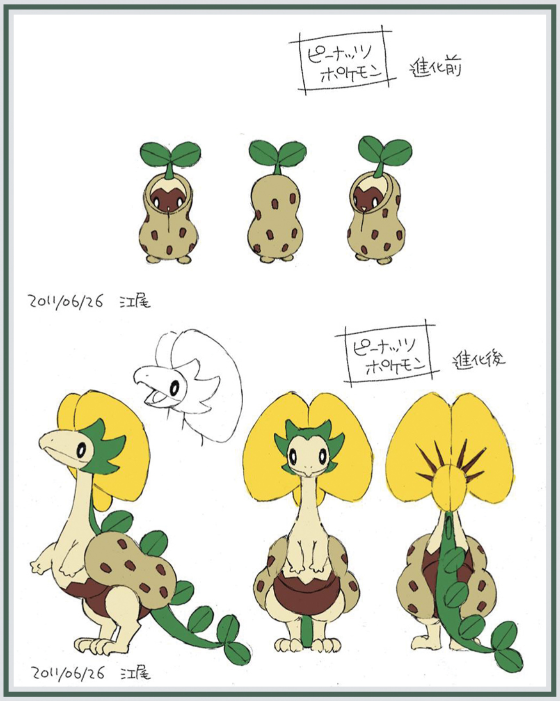
. . . But the music is only the start of the experience! Alarmo is also armed with several motion sensors – and as it detects that you've begun to move and are in the process of lifting your head up off your pillow, it will additionally begin to play sound effects as well. If you've got it set to Mario mode, you'll hear the familiar sounds of collecting coins. If you're a Splatoon fan, you'll get the sounds of ink splats. These nostalgic noises are intended to instantly bring a smile to your face as you wake, and motivate you to get up out of bed and get on with your day. Then, when you do fully rise from your mattress, you'll get a bit of victory fanfare from Alarmo.

This preposterous timepiece is a cheerful reminder that, at its heart, Nintendo is still a toy company and its designers still enjoying coming up with playful products that maybe aren't entirely practical. But if you want to play along, you'll have to pay a pretty penny: Alarmo is priced at $99.99!

You can buy one in person at the Nintendo New York store, or order one through the My Nintendo website shop if you have an active Nintendo Switch Online membership. Expanded sales in traditional retail locations will begin early next year.

Nintendo has also announced that Alarmo will be getting DLC! More titles like Animal Crossing: New Horizons and Mario Kart 8 Deluxe will have their music and sound effects added as options in upcoming updates. (No word yet on whether the Xenoblade series will join the lineup in the future, but Nintendo surely wouldn't miss out on the chance to sell an official clock that audibly declares when it's Reyn Time. Right?)

Will you be buying Alarmo? I wish you whimsical wakeups if so! **— LUCAS**



Lost Pokémon Leaked

Game Freak has suffered a major data breach.

AND ONCE AGAIN we ask: Who's *that* Pokémon?

Though there are now officially over 1,000 different Pokémon to battle and befriend across nearly 30 years' worth of RPG adventures, there are many thousands more who never made it all the way through the design process to appear in a finished product. Concept art of these unused creatures has occasionally made its way beyond Game Freak's walls and into the public eye in the past – but thanks to a recent, huge data breach at the studio, the Internet is now awash with hundreds more never-before-seen prototypes, sketches and scrapped ideas.

We may do a more thorough round-up in the future, but as this issue is being finalized, new 'mons are still being revealed every day – so I'll only highlight a trio here for now. Up above? An idea for a little peanut Pokémon! It would've started small, then literally come out of its shell when it evolved to become a peanut dinosaur. And below? Before Gen 3 got Mudkip, its Water starter was going to be this little bunny whose tail wraps around its body like an inner tube. It's so cute! **– LUCAS**

New Iwata Insights

Masahiro Sakurai has shared new stories.

ANOTHER CHAPTER IN the Sakurai saga has come to an end.

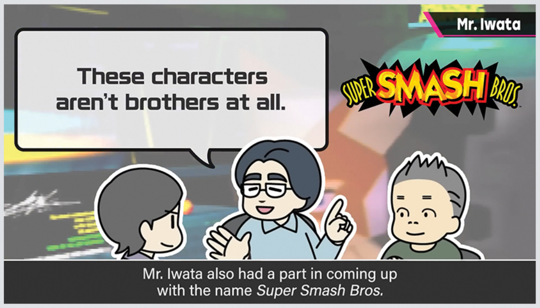
Masahiro Sakurai is best known as the leading creative force behind the Super Smash Bros. series – but with no new Smash sequel officially announced and all the DLC content for Ultimate completed three years ago, Mr. Sakurai has most recently been better known as Professor Sakurai! He launched a YouTube channel called "Masahiro Sakurai on Creating Games" in August 2022, as since then he's been regularly uploading short tutorials, behind-the-scenes development insights and occasional glimpses into his personal life. There are over 270 videos in total now, forming an incredible foundation of education for anyone who will ever be interested in game design as a career in the future!

Recently Mr. Sakurai announced that he would be winding down his work on the YouTube channel – by the time you read this, he will have uploaded his grand finale. But before he wrapped everything up, he was kind enough to publish one last "Grab Bag" video that I wanted to call specific attention to: his reflections on working with Mr. Iwata.

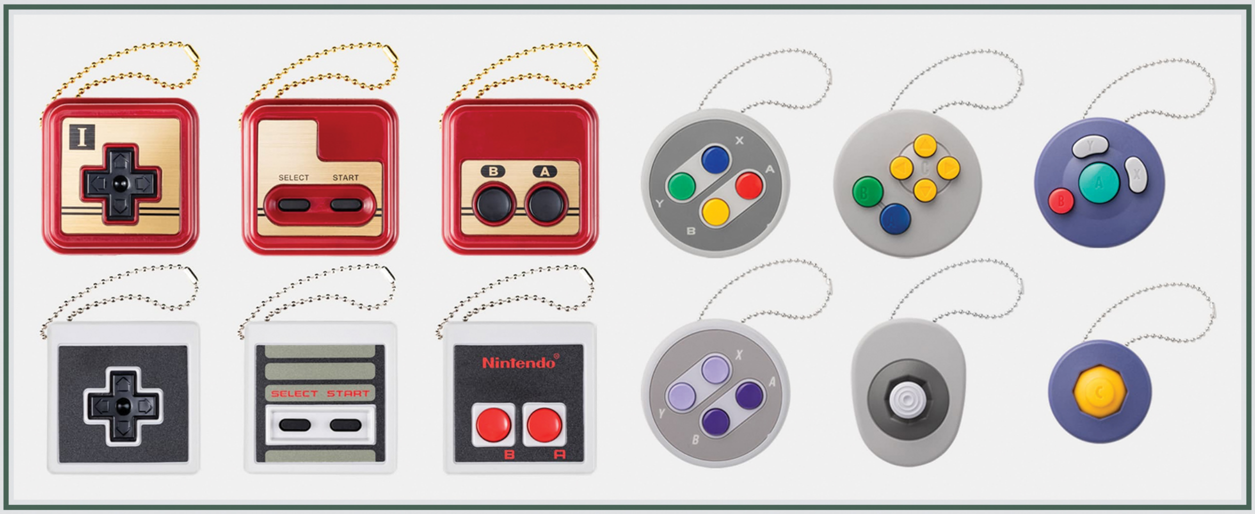
While I was able to gather a treasure trove of information about Mr. Iwata's life when working to write The Impact of Iwata (see the "Making Of" article later in this issue), there will always be more to learn about that great man. And one story Mr. Sakurai shared in this new video happens to tie in perfectly with this issue's theme, too!

"Mr. Iwata also had a part in coming up with the name Super Smash Bros. We had team members suggest a bunch of possible names and words we might use, then held a meeting with Mr. Shigesato Itoi to determine what title we wanted to go with – and Mr. Iwata is the one who picked out the 'Brothers' part. His reasoning was that, even though the characters weren't brothers at all, using the word added the nuance that they weren't simply fighting – they were friends who were settling a little disagreement."

That's just one more way Mr. Iwata's impact will endure! **– LUCAS**



COLLECTOR'S CORNER



Nintendo Controller Button Keychains

Bits and pieces of classic gamepads to carry in your pocket.

CONTROLLERS ARE INHERENTLY fun to hold, and Nintendo's knack for ergonomics and imaginative design are legendary. Add a hint of nostalgia, and these new capsule toys – or gashapon – make great stress relievers. In order to get them, giant gashapon machines have been installed at Nintendo stores in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and the Narita Airport. (Yes, another Japanese exclusive set!) Lines out the door have been seen to use these machines to get one of six new toys from the second set.

The first set had NES and Famicom controller parts, and the new one has SNES, Super Famicom, N64 and GameCube pieces. Their buttons, D-Pads and analog sticks move exactly as they did on the original controllers. In fact, some have used these as replacement parts, like the Super Smash Bros, Melee community farming the C-Sticks from the GameCube keychains! While the wires and mechanisms are not included, it's cool to know the pieces are 1:1 matches and can be swapped. The first set was easy to get, but it looks like the second will be in more demand. Will a third set have Wii parts?

The Latest Kirby Forms to be Plushified

How many Kirby transformations can you name? Just off the top of your head. Go ahead, challenge yourself.

PREORDERS OPENED IN October for a new set of Kirby plushes. These plushes will be released in mid-December from our favorite plush manufacturer, San-ei Boeki! (That means that North America will likely see them release next year under Little Buddy, the international distribution arm for San-ei.)

First up is a classic: Cook Kirby comes equipped with his signature chef hat and a frying pan, and is the tallest one of the set coming in at over six inches with the hat. An ultra-fluffy Animal Kirby is next. It's odd that this Copy Ability has only appeared in one game (Kirby: Squeak Squad) as it's so cute, and infinitely marketable! Then there's my favorite Copy Ability from Kirby's Adventure: UFO! There are so few items made depicting these last two abilities, so it's exciting to see some rarer abilities get some love!

These three are all part of the ongoing All-Star Collection line, which has had a few other releases in the past year as well, like the Diving Kirby pictured above. They'll retail at around $14.99, and I've seen them in the wild at Target and Barnes & Noble.

BY BRETT MARTIN

New Unique Eunie

The Xenoblade line of figmas expands.

THE FOUL-MOUTHED AND hot-tempered High Entia Eunie from Xenoblade Chronicles 3 will join Good Smile's storied line of figma poseable action figures in June of 2025. Preorders closed in October, but these figures have always been relatively easy to obtain after the release period. Right now the figure is Japan-only, but that can always change. She'll come with a standard face, a side-glance face and a shouting face. Accessories include her signature Gunrod and Gunrod barrel parts, and a letter. All of it has exquisite detail from the sculptors at Max Factory and unparalleled articulation. She will cost around $90 before shipping, but shipping from Japan right now is a mess thanks to several factors. Hopefully that will all be cleared up by next year.

LEGO Mario Kart Sets!

All set to blast off the starting line beginning on January 1.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER ALWAYS seems to have LEGO × Nintendo news, and here I am showing off new Mario Kart LEGO sets! We have Blue Yoshi on a Yoshi Bike up first, which looks so cute. Next is a Standard Kart that LEGO Mario can fit in, which also comes with a Racer Toad mechanic. Donkey Kong will ride his DK Jumbo, and a set featuring Baby Mario competing with Baby Luigi features the Biddybuggy and the Tri-Speeder. The Toad's Garage set features two Blue Racer Toad mechanics, the B-Dasher and various kart parts. Finally, the largest set will be $80: Baby Peach's Grand Prix. She'll drive a Wild Wiggler, Lemmy will be in a Landship and Toad will ride a Standard Bike. Get racing!

Straight from Celadon Game Corner

The greatest Gen I in-game prize, now out-of-game!

WHO'S THAT POKÉMON? Close your eyes and imagine hugging your favorite Pokémon in a life-size plush form. Is it fluffy? Is it squishable? Now open them. Nope! It's Porygon, who is neither of those things but is inexplicably the latest Pocket Monster to receive a life-size plush release alongside the likes of Lucario, Arcanine and Mareep.

I mean, it's certainly a conversation piece. The pink-and-teal monstrosity measures nearly 50 inches in height and 30 inches in width. But remember that Porygon is only made of computer code, and that it was the first artificial Pokémon created by man back in 1995, so it may still be running Windows 95. This plush was also made by man, and for the low price of $500 before shipping (!), it can reside in your home and give you that blank polygonal stare for your remaining days. (It might even be able to be repurposed into a nightstand, given its shape.) The release date is March 2025, so get your polyhedral ducks in a row before then.

Orlando Sets its Opening Date

The world's third Super Nintendo World will officially throw open its doors on May 22, 2025.

TEN. YEARS. LATER.

It was May 7, 2015, when the news first went public: Nintendo was joining forces with Universal to officially develop the world's first Nintendo-themed theme park.

It was a dream! An announcement that many longtime fans of the world's best video game company had hoped would be made at some point, but never really thought would become a reality. I mean, just the *idea* of it! A new amusement park experience like Disney World, but filled with all of Nintendo's most famous video game characters instead of Mickey Mouse and his pals? It would be amazing!

Suddenly that wish was promised to be granted. And, slowly but surely, it has been over these last 10 years. Early development and concept art gave way to actual groundbreaking and construction . . . but not in the United States. The first location for the park that officially became known as "Super Nintendo World" was built in Nintendo's home country of Japan, and it first began welcoming guests in early 2021. Just under six years from first announcement to the grand opening – and the Covid-19 pandemic played a big part in pushing that date back. So not too bad, really.

But the wait continued for anyone in America who was unable to book a flight to Japan. Two more years went by, but finally U.S. gamers got their own grand opening in February 2023 – Super Nintendo World opened on our side of the Pacific in California!

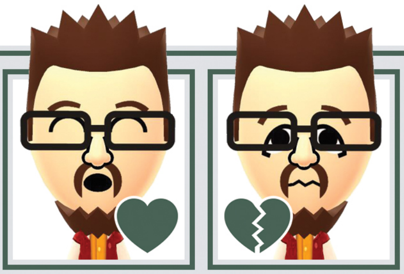
. . . Most of it, anyway. Due to the limited physical space available to fit the park into the existing Universal Studios Hollywood, that version of Super Nintendo World is truncated – it's missing attractions from the Japan park, like the Yoshi-themed ride, and it also has no room to expand either.

So American fans' wait for the *full* Super Nintendo World experience has continued even longer! But finally, *finally*, we have an official opening date to look forward to: The Orlando, Florida, version of the park will open grandly on May 22, 2025!

Almost exactly one decade after that original announcement. It's been a long wait indeed! But it should be worth it in the long run, as the Florida park will have all of Japan's features, as well as the brand-new Donkey Kong area that isn't even open over in Japan quite yet!

So . . . who's going? Maybe I'll be there in May! – **LUCAS**

Great!
At last, the full Nintendo theme park in America!



Oh.
The whole process really took a full decade. Man.

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

NINTENDO'S GETTING NOVEMBER up and running quickly, as this game is due to debut on just the seventh day of the month! Mark it down in the history books: November 7, 2024, is the day the Mario & Luigi series, once thought dead, was miraculously brought back to life. We'll cover the whole history of the superstar siblings' entire saga in the Brothership preview we've prepared for you, beginning on Page 43!

SPEAKING OF RESURRECTIONS, this iconic early installment in the legendary Dragon Quest series will be getting its own new revival just one week later, on November 14. Dragon Quest III HD-2D Remake went radio silent in development, but re-emerged looking better than ever. Take one last pre-release look starting on Page 52!

I BET IT'S been a while since you last heard about this specific set of siblings! (That is, if you ever have.) The Snow Brothers are pretty niche video game characters, though they have started to get more active in recent years – and they'll be making their biggest attempt ever to build up their name recognition when Snow Bros. Wonderland sleds down the mountainside to land on store shelves on November 28. See Page 47!

IT'S BEEN ARGUED (and I've often agreed) that Tetris may very well be the best video game ever made. There's certainly a strong case to be made for it being the most replayable game ever! This icon of the gaming industry just turned 40 years old earlier this year, and a new celebration of that milestone is coming on November 12. See Page 51!

AS WE'RE HEADING into another holiday shopping season, you might be on the lookout for unique stocking stuffers. And you know what would fit just perfectly inside a retro game fan's stocking, and ensure a picture-perfect smile when pulled out? A great-looking new Game Boy! Chromatic, a brand-new Game Boy clone system, promises its preorders will ship in time for Christmas. Take a closer look in the Community section!

LASTLY, WE ALREADY know which Switch title will be leading off Nintendo's lineup as the system enters its ninth calendar year on the market: an HD re-re-release of Donkey Kong Country Returns! It's set for January 16, 2025, and we've got our first preview ready to your perusal ahead on Pages 48 and 49.

> Unless we've all been wildly misled by the persistent rumors surrounding Switch 2, this should be the final holiday season lineup for the original Switch. It's been quite an incredible journey to arrive at this point, and I can't be sad about this last slate of titles that may find themselves wrapped up under gamers' Christmas trees. New Mario & Luigi alone is great! **— LUCAS**

THE PERFECT BRO-DOWN of a beat-'em-up just arrived in the Nintendo Switch Online lineup a few weeks before we finalized this issue all about brotherhood: Battletoads & Double Dragon: The Ultimate Team!

Let me just tell all you younger gamers out there: This crossover was mind-blowing back in 1993. That was six years before Super Smash Bros. was released, and franchise-mixing in video games was an incredibly rare event. Or, in this case, a Rare event!

Yes, the same team at Rareware who became so intertwined with Nintendo as a second-party developer for years afterward took charge of crafting this crossover, which saw Billy and Jimmy Lee of the Double Dragon games link up with the Battletoads – Zitz, Rash and Pimple – and work to bring the pain to a rogues' gallery that drew from both of their brands. The Toads aren't actually brothers, but the Lees are. And we've got more from them if you turn this page!

THE LEE BROTHERS RETURN . . . AGAIN

The sibling superstars of the beat-'em-up genre are going playable once more in the River City Girls 2 Double Dragon DLC.

HOW MANY REBOOTS is this brand gonna get?

Double Dragon was once one of the most iconic brands in video games. Back in the 8-bit era, it stood tall, right alongside other third-party mega-hit series like Castlevania, Mega Man and Contra. It got its start in the arcades, but then jumped over to the Nintendo Entertainment System and presented a trilogy of great beat-'em-ups in the late '80s and into the early '90s. There were Game Boy games and SNES titles. There was an expansion beyond video games, too! Comics and a cartoon series and a live-action movie! All of this happened within the span of about seven years.

. . . And then it all started to fall away. For whatever reason (maybe because that live-action movie was so terrible?), the Double Dragon brand stepped out of the spotlight – then began to fully fade into obscurity. It likely would've stayed there, too . . . if it weren't for all the reboots!

DLC PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD RELEASE: SOON? RATING: E10+

In 2012, WayForward got the rights to make their own take on the Double Dragon series, and instead of crafting a safe and simple sequel, they went all-out and made the wildly original Double Dragon Neon. A full-on love letter to the '80s, it was colorful, bold and even pushed over-the-top new personalities onto series stars Billy and Jimmy Lee, as they gleefully high-fived one another in the midst of kicking bad guy butt.

But . . . WayForward weren't the only ones allowed to bring the Lees back to life. Another studio presented another reboot the following year, a 3D fighter that was so abysmally bad that it has a "17" score on Metacritic. After that, the original developers took the reins back to make an official Double Dragon IV – but it, too, was pretty terrible. So then they went *back* to offering the brand to outside developers, leading to the likes of last year's Double Dragon Gaiden: Rise of the Dragons and its super chibi style. (That one was thankfully pretty good.)

But Double Dragon reboots still aren't done! There's another new one due in 2025: Double Dragon Revive. (The Nintendo Switch isn't currently in the mix for Revive, but maybe it'll land on Switch 2.)

All of that is preamble to say: The Lee Brothers' own brand is *maybe* not the safest place to play as the Double Dragons. So why not take them for a spin in another series?

WayForward's second take on the Lees, after Neon, is their appearance in the River City Girls games. And after being merely NPCs there for several years, new DLC set to debut soon for River City Girls 2 is finally going to make them playable! Billy and Jimmy will get their own story woven into the existing narrative of RCG2, with the Game Grumps back to voice them once more. After being burned by a few of those past reboots, I'm eager to be the Lees in a game I already know is good.

And who knows? Maybe the team at WayForward will get to make another full Double Dragon title after this. Goodness knows the brand is easy to license these days! **– LUCAS**

Assemble a Team and Save the Earth!

EARTH DEFENSE FORCE: WORLD BROTHERS 2

LIKE EVERY SINGLE one of you reading this, I've always wanted to star in a corny B-movie about alien invasions – especially one that has spooky theremin music blasting over footage of giant ants devouring national landmarks. Yet I've somehow never played any of the Earth Defense Force games! "So," I thought to myself, "why not jump into the series by playing EDF: World Brothers 2, the sequel to a side game starring cartoon weirdos?"

Here's all you need to know about the EDF games: Aliens are invading our giant blue marble, they have flying saucers and an army of gargantuan bugs at their disposal, and also sometimes frog people and kaiju enter the fray. Because why wouldn't they? World Brothers 2 follows that basic premise, only with the added threat of Gaiark, a creature lurking within the Earth itself. Your team's mission is to recruit soldiers (the titular "Brothers," but plenty of "Sisters" show up too!) to combat this menace.

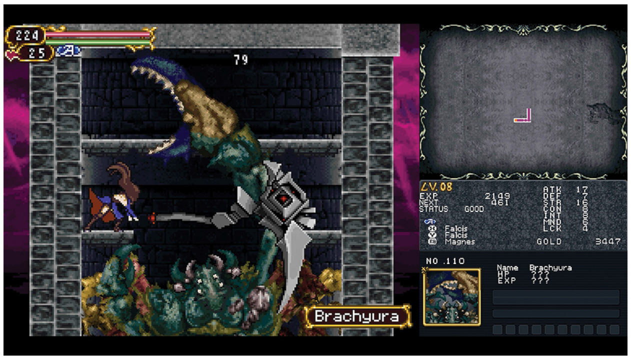
Only a few minutes into the game you'll find yourself surrounded by dozens of giant ants and recruiting a ninja Dracula and a cat person (or maybe it's a lady in a cat costume?) who calls in airstrikes of exploding waffles, when suddenly 50-foot-tall frogfolk barge in to blast you with laser guns. It's a heck of a way to set the tone for a game! The art and humor will likely make you think of the LEGO games, what with everything being built out of bricks and many of the characters wearing wacky outfits.

You'll need to switch characters and use everyone's abilities on the fly if you hope to survive the horde's attacks, but really this adventure is very much aimed toward kids and any advanced player will breeze through every stage. While you can collect new recruits and unlock new weapons and equipment, there isn't much to really discover – you simply run to your target, take out the threat, then move on to the next target. Adults might not get much out of the experience, but it felt like kids would have a great time rushing in to blast hundreds of blocky ants.

Speaking of ants, let me just say that this game has some of my favorite ragdoll physics ever! Defeated ants don't explode or disintegrate, but rather go stock still and just bounce helplessly across the field as if they're made of foam and being tossed around by a strong wind. It looks as if the ants just give up and resign themselves to their fate. Maybe my brain is just a heap of dried-up modeling clay, but I found it amusing every time.

Overall this title's a cute little romp! These little voxel people have won me over and I want to try the rest of the series now. If you, too, want to live out your B-movie dream, check out EDF:WB2! **— LINDSEY**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: D3PUBLISHER
DEVELOPER: YUKE'S RATING: T



Return of the DS Castlevania Era

CASTLEVANIA DOMINUS COLLECTION

WHEN A GAME is released before media outlets get to review it, it usually means one of two things: Either supreme confidence in the product, knowing that it can stand alone, or supreme doubt, with the hope a few marks will grab the game before finding out how abysmal it is.

Happily, we can say that the Castlevania Dominus Collection falls safely into the former category.

This collection contains five titles, and each one has the same basic premise, as most Castlevanias do: Make Dracula sorry he ever woke up, and put him back to bed for another hundred years. That's how Dad Belmont did it, that's how Alucard did it, and it's worked out pretty well so far. But, the devil is in the details in how each of these DS Dracula duels stand apart from one another.

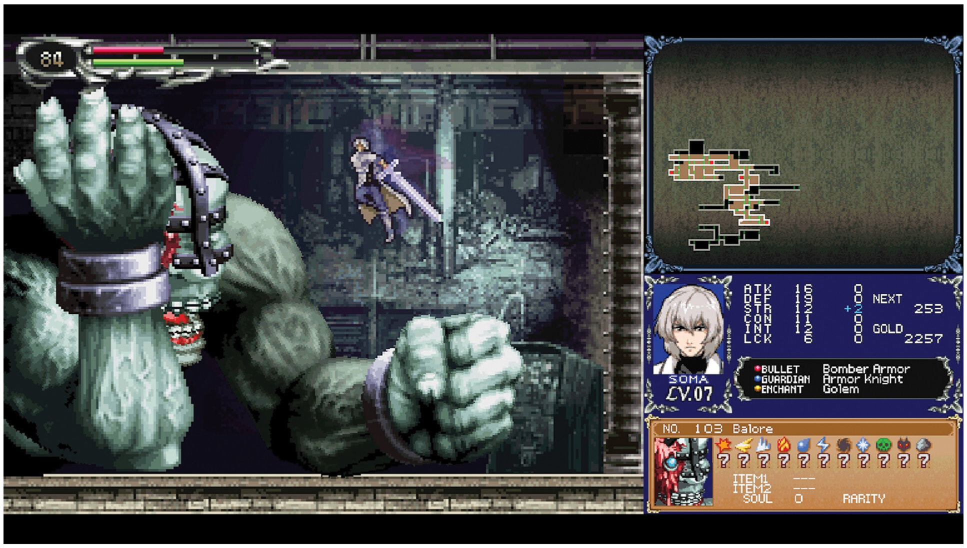
Dawn of Sorrow is a direct sequel to the Game Boy Advance's Aria of Sorrow. It follows that game's protagonist, Soma Cruz, as he treks through the returned castle in 2036, using the Tactical Soul System to gather the souls of his unliving enemies and use their powers as his own. It also employs the Magic Seal System, which originally required the DS' touchscreen controls to draw emblems to seal away enemies, but can now be executed via a series of button prompts.

Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin (my personal favorite of the bunch) takes place in 1944, during World War II. It follows the son of Castlevania Bloodlines' John Morris, Jonathan, as he tries to master the power of the Vampire Killer whip and put a stop to the resurrection of Dracula. Since he doesn't have the full Belmont blood/branding needed to use the whip, he's aided by a childhood friend and magical Belnades clan descendent, Charlotte Aulin, which comes in handy – as you'll need to control and master both heroes in order to win the day. (Unfortunately, the original's multiplayer mode was cut.)

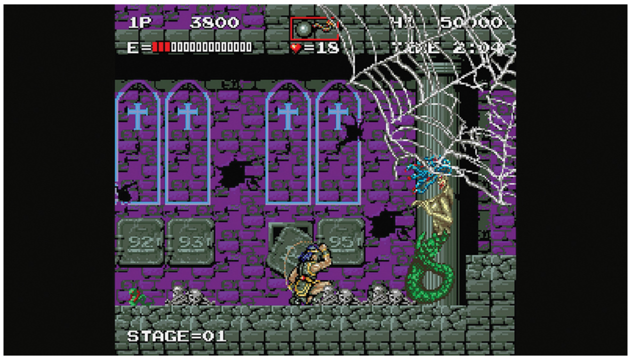
Order of Ecclesia is the final entry for the Nintendo DS. Set in the early 1800s after the Belmont clan had gone missing, the titular Order has created three magical glyphs known as Dominus that will hopefully keep Dracula's evil at bay. A young woman and member of the Order known simply as Shanoa has been chosen to be the vessel for Dominus, but things go wrong when they try to perform the ritual. Now, Shanoa must collect glyphs from enemies and locations within and without Dracula's castle and use them to fight her way to a final showdown.

While these three games belong to the genre affectionately known as "Metroidvanias," the final two pieces in this collection hearken back to the more straightforward origins of the franchise. Haunted Castle is an absolutely wretched attempt at an arcade port of the original Castlevania – a wrong that developer M2 sought to right with the inclusion of Haunted Castle Revisited, a remake of the arcade title that bears close resemblance to the arcade original, but is infinitely more playable (and thus, enjoyable). Even so, it's not the best reason to pick up this package.

The three DS games and Haunted Castle have most of the bells and whistles you'd expect from a collection like this: Save states, button mapping, rewind, an extensive gallery (with pieces that were new to



SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI RATING: T



9.5

even me), multiple regional versions of each game (and the accompanying literature in said gallery), and, somewhat unique to this collection due to the two-screen origins of its three core titles, a variety of configurations for the multiple DS screens. Some even allow for *three* screens to be displayed, so you can keep your map on hand at all times! The only thing that seemed lacking was any sort of option to add filters, though your mileage may vary as to whether that's really a loss.

Haunted Castle Revisited is a more raw experience. Arguably the biggest strike against it is its wonky save system, which sends you back to the beginning of the last stage you completed, so you can . . . complete it again? I wasn't a big fan of that, but I was able to beat it in just my second sitting, so . . . sure. The biggest high point of its remixed take on the series' old arcade abomination is its amazing new soundtrack by Jaelyn Nisperos (a.k.a chibi-tech).

If you're a fan of the Castlevania series, then Dominus Collection is a must-have, full stop. And if you're not so familiar with the franchise, it's actually a pretty good place to start, too. Konami's confidence was rightly placed in this one. — **DAVID**

Robots & Robbers

STEAMWORLD HEIST II

STEAMWORLD HEIST SHOT out on the 3DS like a sniper's bullet back in 2015, landing a surprise hit that helped take the budding franchise to new heights of critical and commercial success. Nine years later, this direct sequel aims to meet its sky-high expectations, taking the action away from the stars above and down to the turbulent tides below. The mixture of turn-based strategy, booty-snagging adventure and 2D sharpshooting that defined the first game is still front-and-center, but instead of being a space pirate, you now steer a submarine around an expansive ocean, battling the Dieselbot Navy and exploring the vast and varied waters of the world.

There's also a lot more story to dig into. Taking place at the far end of the overall Steamworld timeline, Heist 2 stars Captain Leeway, a one-armed scallywag who's got some big shoes to fill. He's the son of a legendary fighter who's adored by the locals, but who has gone missing, leaving him to try to fill her shoes.

Over the course of the story, Leeway struggles to find his own place in the pantheon of pirates, while running afoul of various factions on the high seas, including the aforementioned Navy, other pirates and bounty hunters and, most shockingly, a religious cult called The Rattlers. These creepy combatants are trying to stay alive in the face of a bot-killing plague called "the rust" by replacing their metal parts with the bones of long-dead lifeforms. (So on top of facing off against the occasional giant mech boss or horde of standard soldiers, you'll eventually have to take on a semi-organic skeleton pope!) There's also the promise of larger connections to the crew of Heist 1 and other aspects of the larger Steamworld mythos. Those who stick with the story are in for more than a few satisfying surprises.

The problem with Heist 2 is that, for all its high points, it can feel watered down. In theory, uncharted waters hold endless potential, but in practice, sailing from spot to spot can feel like busywork. Likewise, the expanded capacity to customize the weaponry and skill sets of your crewmates should make for an empowering experience, but spending copious amounts of time managing menus and exploiting abilities to the detriment of your enemies can start to feel dry after Hour 10 or 15 or 20.

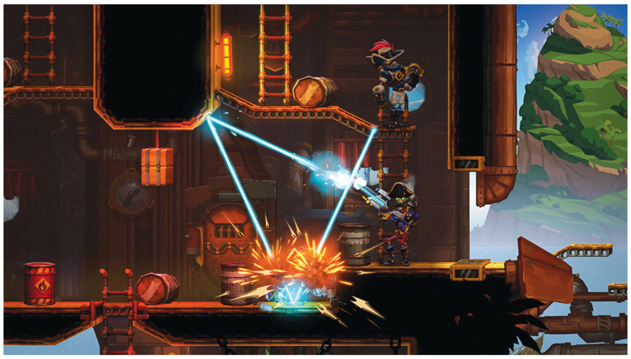
Frankly, it's unfair to compare this sequel to its predecessor in the freshness department, but there's no getting around it. Instead of feeling like a hidden treasure that players happened upon, Heist 2 is forced to continue what the original started, robbing it of any opportunity to be a wholly different affair. Like its star Captain Leeway, Heist 2 tries to escape the shadow of its forebearer, but isn't always able to shine.

(Also, they just flip Leeway's art when he faces left instead of right – so his one arm constantly jumps back and forth. That's distracting.)

But lacking groundbreaking originality and taking more downtime between skirmishes doesn't make Heist 2 a stinker. It's still a highly polished, playful romp, and it's more content-rich than its predecessor. Set your expectations accordingly, and "y'arr" time with this buccaneering crew built of buckets and bolts will be richly rewarded. **– JONATHAN**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: THUNDERFUL GAMES
RATING: E10+



High Speed, Chill Vibes
PHANTOM SPARK

TIRED OF OFFENSIVE and defensive driving and just want to drive? Phantom Spark has stripped away all of the gimmicks to offer a game less obsessed with speed and handling and more focused on momentum.

Players start as a Spark that is then encapsulated into a racing vessel. The Sparks are then introduced to Ceera, a floating snake . . . man . . . *thing* that shows off the menus and controls. After Ceera's done, it's time to meet Fwinti, the welcoming teacher. Players are thrown right into well-designed tracks resembling Wipeout and F-Zero, and they'll face three types of challenges.

Regular races have Sparks learning the tracks, and once a Spark has made it to the finishing gate, they're then immediately thrown into the next type of race where they're challenged by that zone's master. Sparks also race against their ghost from the previous race – the *Phantom Spark*. (Roll credits!) The third type of "race" is a trial in which players learn a racing skill they must then use to defeat a Phantom Spark on a small section of track. These are high-level racing maneuvers and I was generally unable to beat most of them, but passing them is optional and I still learned the concept.

Once all the races are done in a zone, a final, much longer race unlocks that encompasses all the skills that were honed on previous tracks and trials. Generally, it's easy to beat the Zone Masters, as there are no consequences and restarting is easy and recommended; a pop-up appears when players hit a wall showing them the restart button. This gives an air of demanding perfection in racing, which I felt dragged the game down a bit.

Unlocking tracks continues until another zone is unlocked, with three zones in total. The egomaniac Zyn's zone is full of water that can boost a Spark if they're gliding along the flow; the very zen Aaroon's zone is filled with dirt portions that make it difficult to turn and maintain speed. While racing others, Zone Masters will message players stating they've bested one of the previous times. Beating the masters again raises your XP on that track and unlocks Link levels, rather than exchanging a time for a reward like most racing games. It's counterintuitive – while also being an interesting concept that adds replay value. Unlocking Links leads to new vessel looks for your Spark that are purely cosmetic.

The game does suffer from framerate issues – this is exacerbated in Handheld Mode, especially coming off a quick restart. It's a very zen title and players will definitely feel the speed and momentum while experiencing calming techno. Unfortunately, it's a short game that offers little more than local multiplayer and online leaderboards once everything is unlocked. **– BRETT**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: COATSINK & THUNDERFUL
DEVELOPER: GHOSTS RATING: E

Intergalactic Tour
REIGNS BEYOND

THE CARD-PICKING choose-you-own-adventure genre has now been applied to outer space. In Reigns Beyond, players assume the role of a captain of an ominously sentient spaceship named Sandman that subsequently crash-lands on the lead guitarist of a band. You finish the set (!), become the new guitarist, repair the ship and then take responsibility for all further decisions regarding the band, the ship and all your shipmates. Each decision comes in fast and unrelentingly, and all of them are presented with minimalistic illustrations drawn across digital cards.

The first decision is always where to go, with several paths branching off the planet you're on that lead to fortunes . . . as well as many, many misfortunes. Death is around every corner, and it often comes inexplicably and horrifically. At first it's funny and without consequence, as Sandman creates a clone of everyone before your last planet jump and starts over. After 10 or 20 times, though? It's just frustrating, and your own lost time is the consequence. Yes, space is dangerous, but it just seems like you're banging your head against a wall to see if there's a weak spot, especially with how many decisions you make and how preposterous the right and wrong answers seem.

When on a planet, you can usually play a gig for cash, which consists of a rudimentary rhythm game involving catching hearts with a guitar along a line vanishing into the horizon. You can also go to a bar to meet the locals or stop at the shop to purchase something – like guitars or random junk – that can either do nothing or save your life.

During flights between destinations, Sandman and your crew will give you reports on the ship's systems. They'll also air grievances or offer help, which can positively or negatively affect the ship. The electrical system, oxygen, shields and fuel are all things to keep an eye on, but affecting the oxygen will end your run faster than anything.

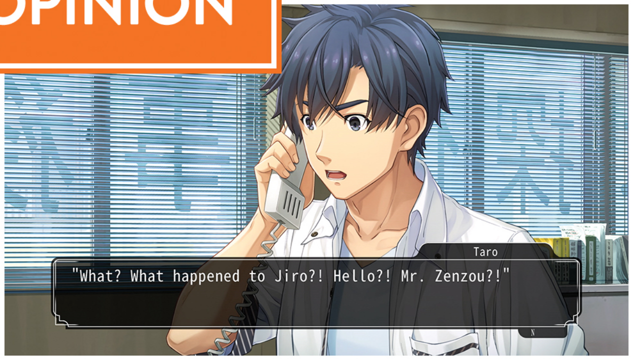
The characters you meet are just as wild as the premise you find yourself in. Your crew/bandmates are all quirky, and your band agent happens to be a ravenous shark (who's also a loan shark). A stowaway bear is either your best friend or your worst enemy, and the egomaniac Emon Lusk tries to assert himself on your decision-making skills but ends up messing things up. Things just get weirder from there.

If you have the fortitude to survive the onslaught of deaths that inevitably await you to see the full plot of the game, you're better than me. It's a good game for short bursts of play and it's very cheap, but it may just be too *out there* for many players. **– BRETT**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DEVOLVER DIGITAL
DEVELOPER: NERIAL RATING: T

SECOND OPINION



The Road to Emio

FAMICOM DETECTIVE CLUB: THE MISSING HEIR

IT ISN'T OFTEN that Nintendo does something that they've never done before – so whenever that happens, I have to take notice. Recently, the company announced that they'd developed an M-rated game in-house for the first time ever: Emio – The Smiling Man, a new sequel in the old Famicom Detective Club series. That piqued my interest . . . and lit a fire under me to finally find the time to play the great-looking remakes of the first two Detective Club titles that hit the Switch three years ago.

The Missing Heir was the first tale ever told in this series. In it, you take control of an amnesic teenaged detective who's trying to solve both a murder mystery and the mystery surrounding his own memory loss. You can name this protagonist as you please, but the closest thing to a canon name for the character is "Taro Ninten."

The Detective Club series falls squarely into the "visual novel" genre, meaning the gameplay mostly involves choosing different topics to ask NPCs about as you interrogate them to gather information. You'll occasionally need to examine a scene visually, moving a magnifying glass-shaped cursor around the screen to highlight areas of interest. It's all fairly easy-going, and the story flows well from one character to the next, with just the right amount of shocking revelations and plot twists along the way.

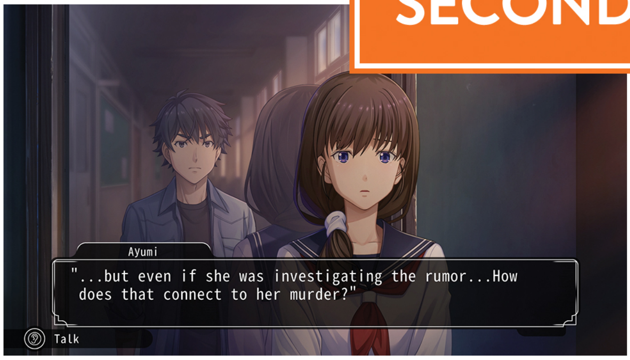
Where The Missing Heir falters is in its age, as sometimes you'll hit what seems like a total dead end in the conversation tree and you'll be left scratching your head as to how to proceed further. Having an FAQ/walkthrough open nearby ends up being essential to keep the fun factor from fizzling.

But that aspect was improved in this game's sequel . . . **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: MAGES RATING: T

8.0

SECOND OPINION



The Club's First Case

FAMICOM DETECTIVE CLUB: THE GIRL WHO STANDS BEHIND

ONE YEAR AFTER The Missing Heir made its debut in Japan (in 1988), it received this sequel – which turned out be a prequel, set two years earlier. It told the origin tale of Taro Ninten as he first became a junior detective-in-training, as well as recording his first meeting with the series' deuteragonist, the cheerful Ayumi Tachibana. But Ayumi, sadly, isn't her usual happy self when we first meet her – because her best friend, Yoko, has just been killed.

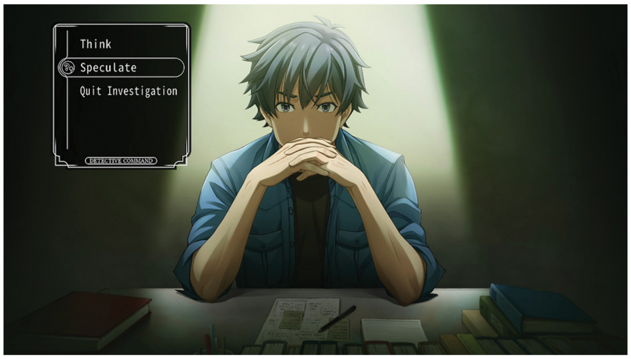
I never realized these games were quite so intense and adult-oriented before finally sitting down to play these remakes, but having now done so I can totally see how these two titles could lead next into an M-rated murder mystery like Emio. There are some traumatic visuals in both of these original games, and this one in particular wastes no time, as you're made to examine poor Yoko's lifeless body in the very first scene.

If you've got the stomach for such things, then The Girl Who Stands Behind is another story worth seeing through to its conclusion – and it does have fewer conversational stumbling blocks than its predecessor. (I still reached for an FAQ a time or two with this one, but not as often as I did with The Missing Heir.) On those occasions, I was just reminded that these visual novels were some of the first ever made, back in the '80s, so of course they're not going to feel as smooth as more modern efforts in the genre.

What is inarguably smooth are the modern visuals – these games just look spectacular now! You can really tell that the developers at Mages just absolutely adored the old games and spared no ounce of effort in bringing their stories up to today's graphical standard. (The stories still take place in the late '80s, though, so that's a bit of extra nostalgic fun.)

If you, like me, never played these – you really should! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: MAGES RATING: T



8.5

Manic Restaurant

PIZZA TOWER

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: TOUR DE PIZZA RATING: T

IT'S A TALE as old as time: When his pizzeria is threatened to be decimated by the elusive Pizzaface, pizza maker Peppino leaps into action to smash-and-grab his way through the titular Pizza Tower, a labyrinthian collection of dungeons and bosses. After rescuing all the toppings (and then some) and reaching the end of each stage, players must make a mad dash back through the same level, backwards, before time runs out – if this setup sounds familiar, you're not wrong.

Pizza Tower wears its vivid inspirations on its sleeves, stepping in where Wario Land has laid dormant for more than just a few years. Not satisfied with simply being a loving homage to another garlic-loving Italian-American*, the game draws heavily from the attitude of gonzo '90s-era animation and retro pizza culture to create fully a customized dish of bizarre toppings that still come together to make one familiar meal.

More than just a few flashy sprites and shockingly bawdy gags, Pizza Tower excels with some of the tightest controls on a 2D platformer in years. At first glance, the game seems like sheer insanity, constantly moving at a breakneck pace while the invincible Peppino is squashed, stretched and mutilated just to squeeze through the next opening. But once you have the game in your own hands, it genuinely comes together in a way that makes all the sense in the world. This is a game just crying out for a speedrun. And if you aren't exactly doing any awesome games quickly yourself, the controlled chaos on-screen certainly still makes you feel like a high-speed expert.

Even if you don't harbor much nostalgia for Pizza Tower's first-party progenitors, it still stands on its own feet thanks to satisfying level design and some unbelievable spritework. And if you crave more after just the initial slice, the game is stuffed to the crust with secret stages, extra mechanics and even a New Game+ featuring a rather randy parody of The Noid. (Ask your parents, kids!)

Peppino and Pizza Tower have already made a name for themselves in the pantheon of modern indie games in just the past year, so this overdue arrival on Switch has certainly been long-awaited. By drawing on some of the more interesting and overlooked elements from classic Nintendo titles, the game feels like a perfect fit on this platform.

**Wait, is Wario Italian? Or maybe he's German? . . . or Greek?*

– JOHN-CHARLES

9.0

The Point-and-Click Partners

SAM & MAX: THE DEVIL'S PLAYHOUSE

BEFORE TELLTALE GAMES became a household name for many thanks to the critical success of their macabre and dour take on The Walking Dead, the small studio largely dabbled in the realm of comedy adventure games – most notably their comedy trilogy adaptation of Sam & Max. Sadly, Telltale eventually closed their doors. But in recent years, a team including some of their original designers reacquired the rights to these Sam & Max games and has set about remastering them, with a staggering amount of polish. Their most recent endeavor is the final of these games and feels like the very project the last two remasters were building up to.

The Devil's Playhouse has been a fan favorite of the series since its original release in 2010. It takes the crimefighting duo of a giant dog and rabbity thing and throws them headfirst into a five-part comedy epic colored by sci-fi pulp, grindhouse cinema and a healthy dose of Lovecraftian esoterica.

Following the events of their last adventure, Max comes upon a stash of mystic toys that grant him otherworldly psychic powers . . . conveniently just as intergalactic apes and ancient cults converge on the duo to vie for control of the reality-bending trinkets. Somehow, these absurd twists stay true to what works with these characters, while remaining effortlessly creative and funny all the way to the apocalyptic finale.

These psychic powers provide a myriad of ways for players to interact with the world. While you likely can already imagine how powers like telekinesis and future vision are used to solve puzzles, there are constant surprises that keep any one ability from becoming a crutch or falling back on illogical solutions. Just as Telltale was nearing the end of their sting of traditional adventure games, they really landed on a winning formula that, thankfully, holds up satisfyingly well and requires minimal adjustments to work today.

Players new to Sam & Max may not want to start here, since this third (and final) entry cashes in on a lot of pre-established characters and continuity from the previous games – lest you find yourself confused by details like how Max is the current sitting President. The previous remasters ensure that working up to this final entry feels more like enjoying one complete work instead of trudging through the growing pains of a young studio.

The developers behind the remasters, Skunkape Games, once again deliver the same polish to The Devil's Playhouse as the last two packages. Dynamic lighting, retouched animations and uncompressed audio all bring the game up to a modern standard. All three remasters now feel of a complete piece, creating a definitive way to experience some of the best games of the point-and-click genre. **– JOHN-CHARLES**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SKUNKAPE GAMES RATING: T

Brothers Battle to Find Their Father

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SPLINTERED FATE

IT'S BEEN FOUR decades now since the world first met the first forms of this fighting foursome, and they've always been easily and instantly identified by the four traits explained in their series' name. They're teenagers. They're mutants. They're ninjas and, of course, they're turtles. But they're more than that!

I'd argue that a fifth characteristic has come to define these same characters across most of their incarnations over the years, and that's the fact that in addition to all the other things that make them themselves, they're also a family. They're brothers! They've spent their entire lives together, growing up together.

And that sibling relationship has become so central to so many of their stories – adding extra depth to Leonardo and Raphael's heated rivalry, the lighthearted teasing they sling at each other in both peaceful moments and in the midst of battle, and so many other moments of concurrent camaraderie and conflict. But any time these shellheads butt heads too severely, they always come back together again to stand on one more piece of common ground: their mutal love and respect for their adoptive father, Master Splinter.

That shared sonship is the driving force of this video game adventure starring the turtle bros: Splintered Fate begins with the mysterious disappearance of their Dad, and their burning desire to find out what happened to him, to bring him home safely and to dish out painful justice on whoever's responsible for stealing him away is palpable.

The elevated emotion comes across beautifully through the game's fully voiced cutscenes, as each character is performed by truly gifted actors who all totally nail every sentence of the script they were handed. These scenes are not animated visually – beyond some great-looking but unmoving art of each character shown on-screen as they each take their turn to talk – but the vocal performance is just so good that the whole story still ranks in as a top-tier Turtles tale.

And thankfully, though the storytelling sets a high bar, the gameplay is more than able to match it. I was excited to get my hands on this one ever since seeing its elevator pitch: "It's like Hades, but with the TMNT brand." And it is exactly and precisely that. And that combination turns out to be just as good as I'd hoped it could be.

Like Hades, you set out from the underworld (this time the sewers),

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SUPER EVIL MEGACORP DEVELOPERS: SUPER EVIL MEGACORP & PARAMOUNT GAME STUDIOS RATING: E10+

and battle your way onward and upward through randomly generated arenas until ultimately arriving at the final boss battle . . . or, more likely, falling short somewhere along the way. But, like Hades, failure is just a temporary setback here: You invest coins you've gathered to boost your HP, damage output and other abilities so that every time you begin a new run, you're a little stronger than the time before, and a little more likely to find the finish line.

The Hades connections continue with the fact that every time you clear a room, you're granted a boon – some upgrade or extra effect added to your attacks to make you more formidable (for that run only). There are whole skill trees of Water and Fire and Lightning (or "Utrom") abilities, just to name a few.

My favorite builds have focused on the "Ooze" abilities, a.k.a. poison. You can unlock powers like the Ooze Dash that passively poisons foes as you dodge past them, meaning with enough patience you can take down even the baddest bosses without once hitting them with your main weapon. The opposite approach is a blast too, of course: Fully fixating on getting up close and personal and bringing the pain with the brothers' classic, signature armaments. Raph's blazing fast sais are my fave there.

With repeated runs and enough experimentation, you'll discover your own favorite Turtle to be and your own favorite abilities to enhance him with. I had fun with every one of them when playing solo.

. . . But fielding the full fighting force of four is even more fun! My small army of sons stepped up to help me test out the four-player couch co-op that was added just for this Switch port, and we had a blast. We played on my save file that had already cleared the campaign more than once, so the baddies hit harder and the attack patterns were insane – but Carter, Calvin and Cooper all held their own.

The multiplayer is tense, but also forgiving, in that fallen Turtles are revived with a small chunk of HP if even one brother survives the current room. We had a few times when only I made it out alive, with just the tiniest sliver of health left! Cheers were cheered. Memories were made!

In the end, TMNT: Splintered Fate is going into the books as one of my favorite games of 2024. If you're a fan of Hades or of TMNT, you should definitely play it. And if you like both? You should play it *now!* **– LUCAS**

Yumetaro Returns!

GIMMICK! 2

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: SUNSOFT & CLEAR RIVER GAMES
DEVELOPER: BITWAVE GAMES RATING: E

MAKING A SEQUEL to Gimmick! was always going to be a risky venture. It's one of those late NES era games that's earned a very enthusiastic cult following, but still remains relatively unknown. With a sterling reputation to live up to and basically no brand recognition to fall back on, a sequel could only be a labor of love – and that's exactly what Gimmick! 2 is.

For anyone who hasn't played the original (available now on Switch as Gimmick! Special Edition) you play as an adorable little monster named Yumetaro in a physics-based platforming adventure. Yumetaro has a very specific weight to him that lands somewhere between Sonic and Mario. He also has the ability to summon stars that serve as his primary means of attack – but there's a lot more to these stars than just offense: They're also a means of transportation! Yumetaro throws them in a downward motion, and they bounce around off of nearly anything in their path. If you can manage to jump on top of one, you can ride it around – a skill you'll have to master if you want to find all of the game's many, MANY secrets.

Like the original, Gimmick! 2 requires Yumetaro to find a number of hidden items to gain access to the true ending, and they're hidden extremely well. You're going to have to do some seriously crazy maneuvers to get these things. Thankfully, not only are the controls tight as a drum, but the penalty for failure is practically nonexistent.

There's no longer any kind of lives system in place, which gave the developers the freedom to get truly devious with some of these puzzles. Often in the original game you would come across a special item, but then fail at executing the complicated jumps required to get it, causing you to lose a precious life – or worse yet, get a Game Over. But Gimmick! 2's generous checkpoint system takes the sting out of failing, encouraging creative solutions to the various challenges on hand.

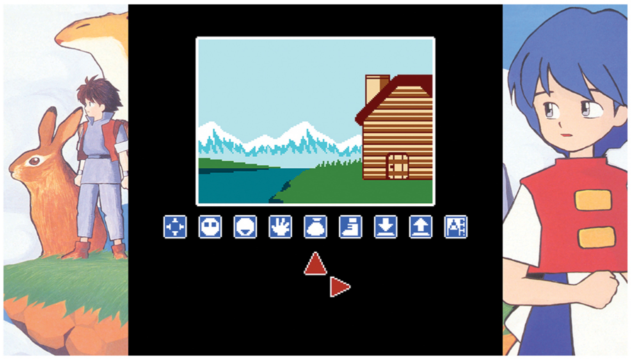
Gone too are the first game's potions, but in their place is a new puzzle mechanic that involves throwing your star into specific receptacles that perform numerous functions. Some open doors. Others make platforms move. Mastering not only getting your star into these spots, but when exactly to summon them back, reversing their effects, is an absolute must.

In terms of presentation, this sequel is absolutely wonderful. The visuals are bright, beautiful and well-animated, while the music, largely composed by the legendary David Wise, is gorgeous. It is a very different kind of soundtrack, leaning into more environmental tunes than the catchy melodies of the original, but it works extremely well in this game's new, enormous stages.

Speaking of which, if I did have one complaint, it would be that the stages can be maybe a bit too long – but that's a minor complaint in an otherwise stellar game.

It's great to see another true sequel to a Sunsoft classic emerge in the modern era. Any platformer fans who enjoy a challenge should give Gimmick! 2 a go. It's not easy, but it is extremely rewarding. **– KRIS**

9.0



An Eclectic Collection

SUNSOFT IS BACK! RETRO GAME SELECTION

THE LAST FEW years have ushered us into a golden age of redemption for previously unlocalized games, as the Switch has hosted the Western release of dozens of notable titles from past Nintendo platforms that were only ever originally sold in Japan. Sunsoft has now added three more titles to that growing list!

The "Sunsoft is Back! Retro Game Selection" contains three Sunsoft-published Famicom titles that never got NES versions decades ago – but now all three have been translated into English at long last.

First up is The Wing of Madoola, the only one of this trio that I'd ever really heard of before now. It's one of the earliest 8-bit games to feature a female protagonist: Lucia, who's on a quest to retrieve a stolen magical statue from a demon-filled fortress. The gameplay is presented as a side-scrolling action RPG, as Lucia runs, jumps, hacks into foes with her sword and can find magic spells to cast that do extra damage with fairly flashy visual effects (for 1986).

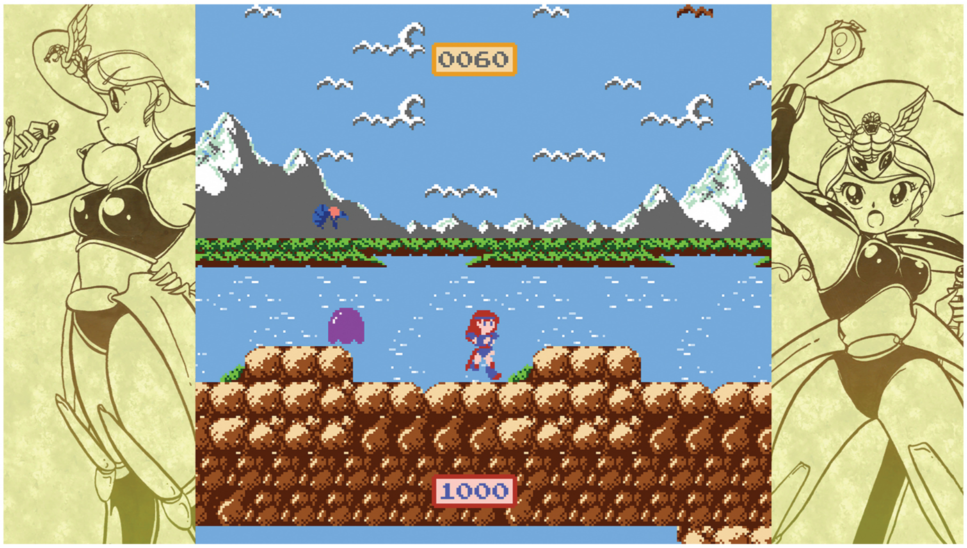
Unfortunately, the game feels unbalanced and frustrating. Enemies constantly swarm your position, your weapon is ridiculously weak to start and exploration is visually confusing. Madoola is muddy and potentially maddening.

Game #2, Ripple Island, is totally different! It's a first-person point-and-click quest that certainly took the most time and trouble to translate, since it has a ton of text. It hails from 1988 and is visually impressive in that context, with a fairly vast variety of unique scenes and characters to encounter. It's also apparently a cult classic back in Japan!

But it has its own problems: It's difficult to understand exactly how to play it and make forward progress (a common fault of this genre in this era), and the Retro Game Selection interface housing the game does nothing to help. The original instruction manual – entirely written in Japanese – is offered as a piece of archival artwork, but Sunsoft didn't bother to take the time to actually translate it to offer any instructions in English. I'm taken aback by that! That kind of work would've taken a week to do, tops. I could've done it myself if they'd contacted me. What a weird, easily avoidable mistake.

Thankfully, the third and final title selected for the Selection is fully playable and understandable with no English explanation required. It has a ridiculously lengthy name: "Firework Thrower Kantaro's 53 Stations of the Tokaido." And it is a jolly romp of a retro action game. You take control of Kantaro, a guy who has to run across the entirety of Japan to get to a date on time. He's armed with an endless supply of bombs, which he chucks in slow arcs through the air or places on the ground as traps. The timing is tricky and the foes are most often too fierce to face head-on, but the built-in Rewind feature makes it funny to fail instead of frustrating. I genuinely enjoyed playing that one.

One winner out of three may not justify this collection's $9.99 price tag, but Sunsoft superfans will surely want to dive in themselves to make their own judgment call. **– LUCAS**



7.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SUNSOFT RATING: E10+

Link's Awakening, Abbreviated

CASTAWAY

IT'S NOT EVERY day that a meteorite hits your spaceship, or you crash on a deserted island, or your dog gets kidnapped by a pterodactyl. Fortunately, you can rescue that dog less than an hour later!

Castaway is kind of like a short version of Link's Awakening. It takes place on an island, your first weapon is a sword, there's also a hookshot, etc. But the game is *so* short that even first playthroughs will only take 40 to 60 minutes!

. . . And that's part of the reason why I think it's such a great game for people who are learning how to speedrun. Since it's so short, you can easily remember your route!

The gameplay is similarly simple. Besides moving, there are only four actions: Y is sword, X is pickaxe, A is hookshot and B is a dodge/roll. (It's basically a speed boost.) Those few options make for simple choices: Do you keep your distance and slowly wear your enemies down with the hookshot, or do you go for long-wind-up big hits with the pickaxe, and risk taking damage? Do you roll past enemies and risk bonking into one, or conserve your hearts and clear the threat? Do you go out of your way to pick up extra Heart Containers, or practice beating bosses better? All those reasons make me feel like this is the perfect game for the speedrunning scene.

Castaway's puzzles are great too — even the ones outside of the game's three dungeons. Those dungeons are *also* great, each having a balanced number of battles and puzzles. And the boss battles are wonderful (even if there are only three of them).

Speaking of enemies, there are technically only eight of them (including the bosses, and one is just a variant of the first enemy with added rock armor), but they're all great. The dungeons also all have Big Keys (also like Link's Awakening) and a prize: Dungeon 1 has the pickaxe, the second has the hookshot and the last one has your dog.

That's pretty much everything you need to know about the island! (I should also mention that chopping up bushes and beating enemies rewards you with fruit or meat that restores health.)

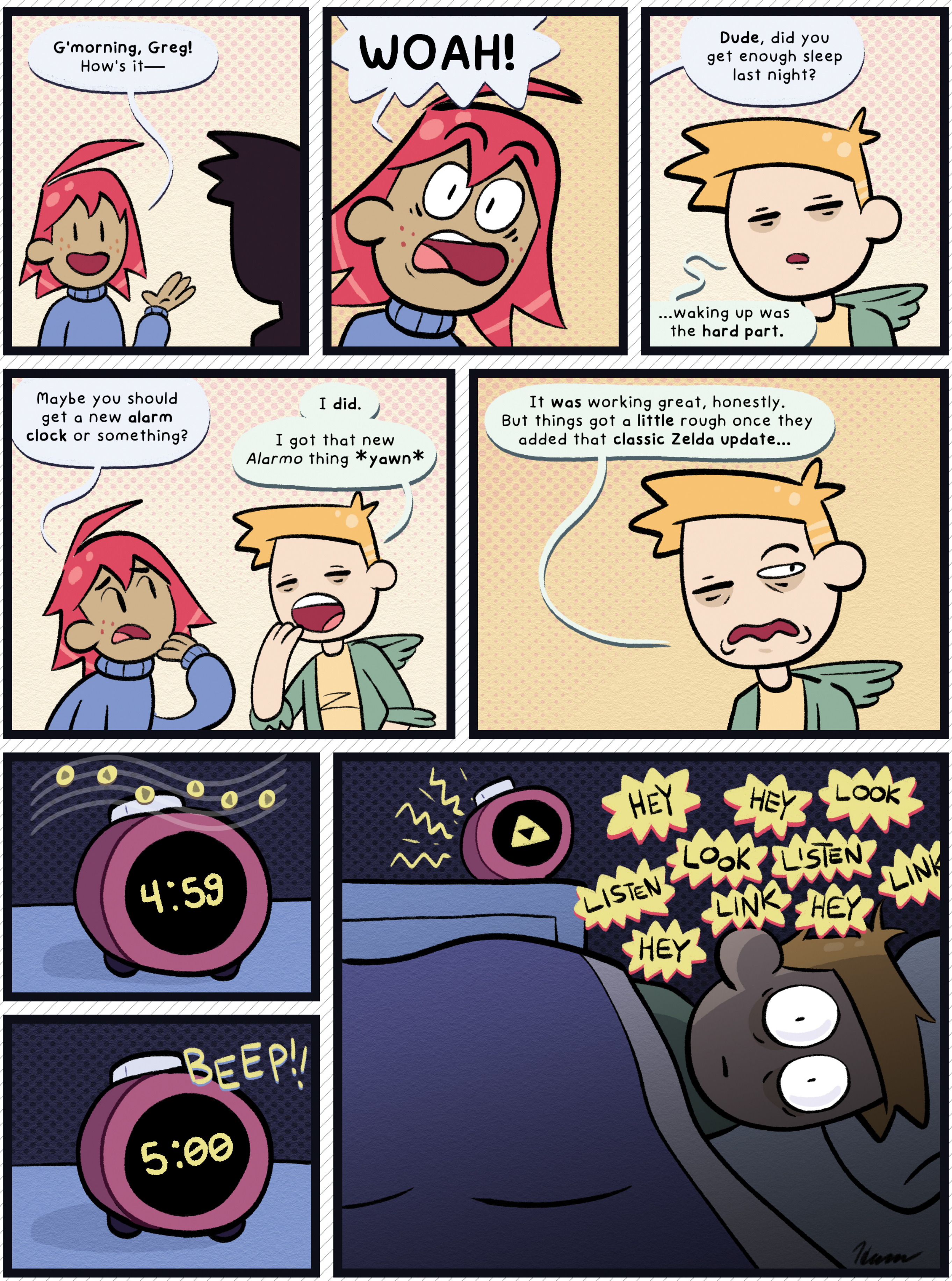
Beyond the super short main campaign, there's also another mode called The Tower — it tests your endurance against waves of enemies in increasingly difficult areas. But enemies drop experience points there, and when you level up you can choose an upgrade like more pickaxe damage or another Heart Container. There are 50 floors to climb in total — which might be more screens than the island itself!

My record for beating the island is less than 20 minutes. But don't be impressed! With a little practice, you can do that too! — **CARTER**

9.0

Special thanks to my just-turned-13-year-old son Carter for taking the lead for this review! He loves both the Zelda series and speedrunning, so I knew this mix of those two would be right up his alley. I played through it myself too (and why not, when it only takes a few minutes?), and I concur that it's a blissful bite-sized homage to a classic. ***— LUCAS***

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CANARI GAMES RATING: E



BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

THE BOND BETWEEN BROTHERS

Brothers bicker. Brothers battle. But the best of brothers always have each other's backs!

BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING, RE[illegible]CA RUDRANATH, BRETT MARTIN, TONY PONCE, JONATHAN HOLMES, DAVID OXFORD & LUCAS M. THOMAS

THE MARIO BROTHERS

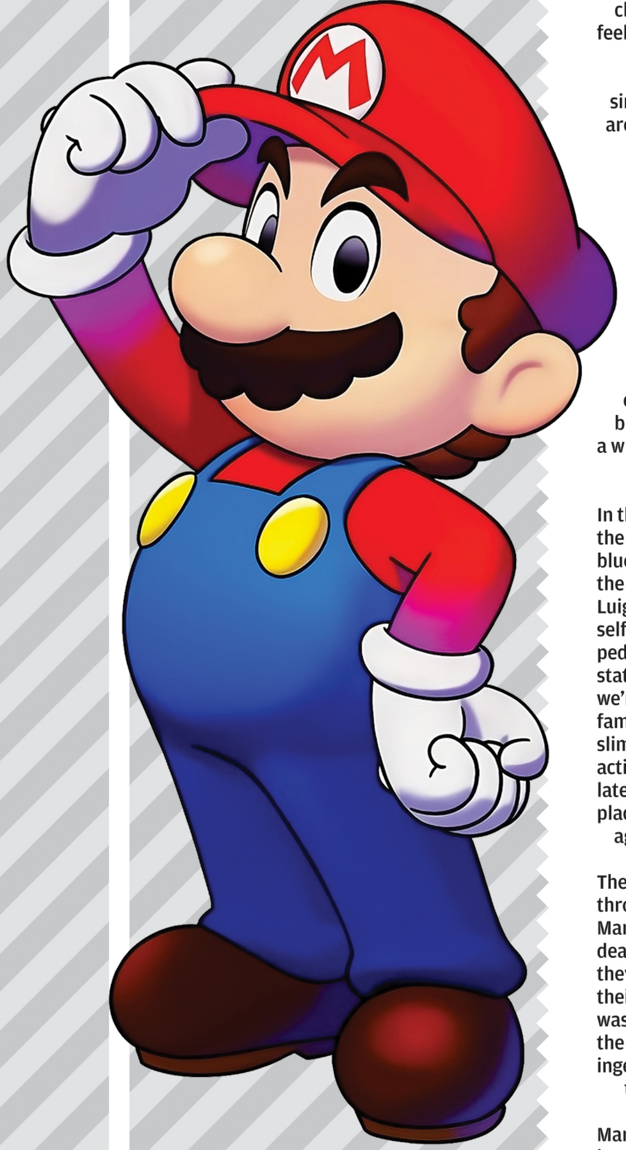
According to Shigeru Miyamoto, the Mario cast is analogous to Mickey Mouse & Friends: a troupe of actors whose roles and relationships are cycled through to suit a given story. That's why no one questions how Bowser can be a despot bent on conquest one day, then a cantankerous yet reliable tennis doubles partner the next. But while Bowser may turn on the villainy like he's clocking into work, or Peach's romantic feelings toward her suspendered savior wax and wane like the moon, one pairing has remained steadfast since the start . . . Mario and Luigi are brothers through and through, and no force in this world or the next could ever tear them apart.

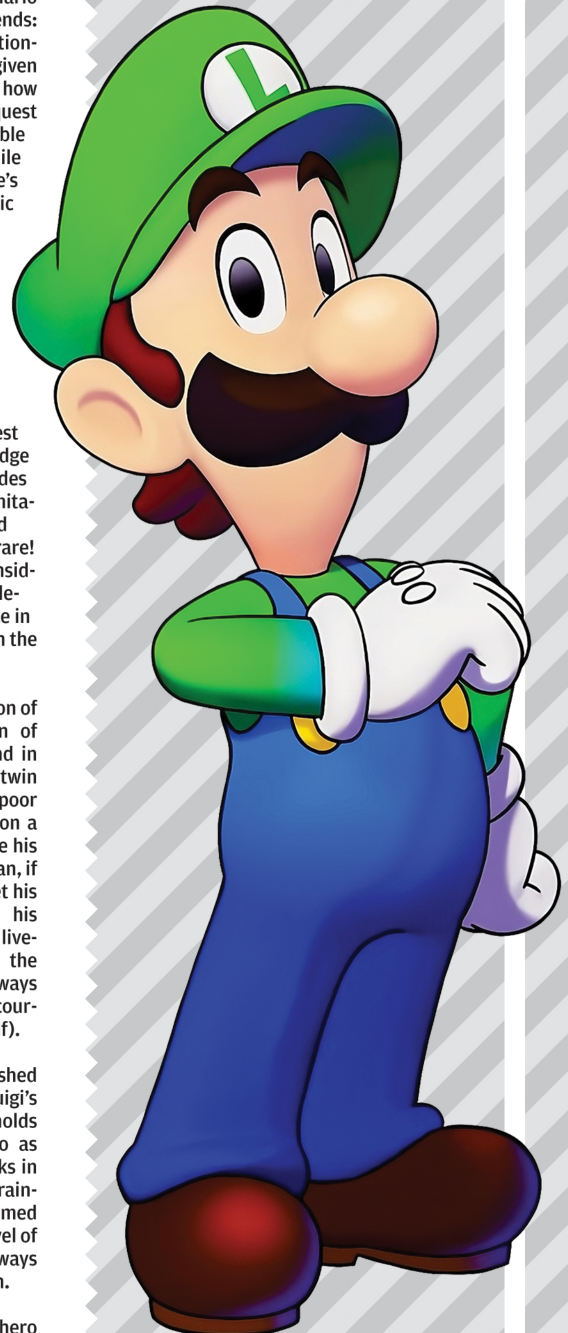
Most siblings in fiction are defined by the conflicts that repeatedly test their trust, or the ideological wedge that plants them on opposing sides of the good/evil divide. An indomitable connection rooted in love and support, on the other hand? Very rare! Narratively, such a bond may be considered bland, though I contend that celebrating a wholesome relationship once in a while is a needed palate cleanser given the pervasive toxicity in today's media.

In the red corner, there's Mario, champion of the Mushroom Kingdom and paragon of blue-collar workers the world over. And in the green corner, his younger yet taller twin Luigi, whose cowardly tendencies and poor self image cause him to place his bro on a pedestal he can never reach. Yet despite his status as a leading man — *the* leading man, if we're being honest — Mario has never let his fame negatively affect his pride in his slimmer sibling. In the Super Show, the live-action movie, the various comics and the latest animated film, Mario has always placed immense faith in Luigi (and encouraged him to have more faith in himself).

The proof is in the pudding: Luigi has pushed through his fears in not one but three Luigi's Mansion games to rescue everyone he holds dear. He stands toe-to-toe with Mario as they perform awe-inspiring Bros. Attacks in their shared RPGs. And when he was brainwashed in Super Paper Mario and assumed the guise of Mr. L, he demonstrated a level of ingenuity and tenacity that he could always tap into, had he just believed enough.

Mario clearly sees Luigi as his personal hero just as much as Luigi considers Mario his. That's why they'll never have a heartbreaking falling out: To paraphrase their motivating refrain from their recent movie, nothing can hurt them as long as they're together!


MARIO


LUIGI

THE DOUBLE DRAGONS

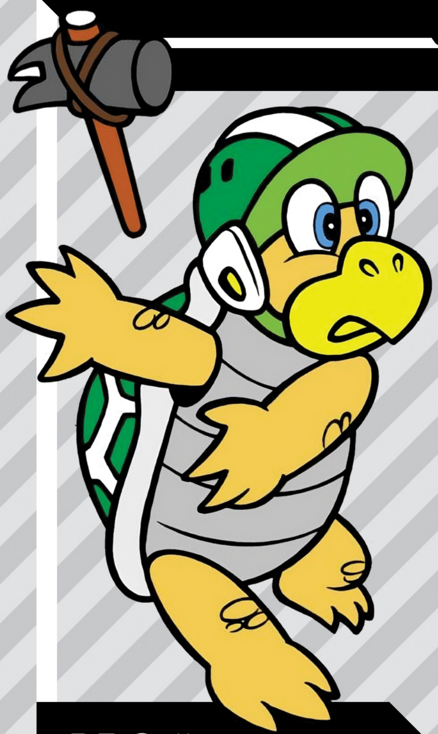
BILLY LEE

The Double Dragons are legends in the belt-scrolling space — and by "legends," I mean their exploits are as malleable as tales of Greco-Roman mythology. In their first arcade outing, the twins rescued the lovely Marian from the Black Warriors gang, only to each claim Marian's love for himself by trading blows with one another. The NES port took the sibling rivalry a step further, casting Jimmy as the Black Warriors' leader outright! In either case, the boys squashed their beef for the sequels, though their fair-weather friendship would continue to be beset by a disregard for any proper canon.

They teamed up with the Battletoads for a most bizarre space-bound crossover. They dabbled in '80s surfer jargon in Double Dragon Neon, only to become independent River City shop owners who sounded suspiciously like Game Grumps comedy duo Arin Hanson and Dan Avidan. Speaking of River City, an unrelated pair of high school delinquents have been going around introducing *themselves* as the Double Dragons! And what's the deal with this Sonny Lee jabroni, acting like the long-lost third Lee brother!?

JIMMY LEE

THE HAMMER BROTHERS



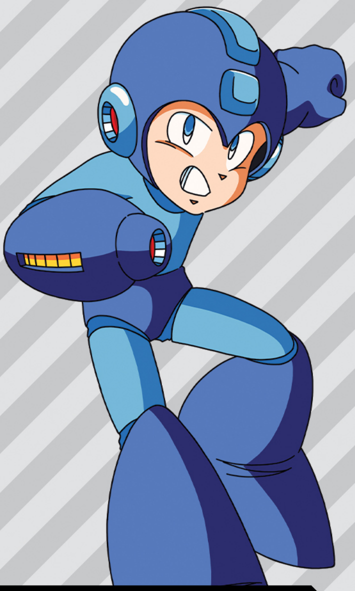
BRO #1

Before Mario and Luigi ran afoul of that dastardly duo of Wa-named doppelgangers, their primary rivals in the sibling space were two bipedal Koopas with a flair for flinging blunt objects! Making their debut in Super Mario Bros., the Hammer Bros had many of the same abilities of the player character: They could jump, throw projectiles, and also came in pairs! Even Bowser wanted to be like them, later learning to hurl hammers just like these lackies. Almost overnight, this terrible twosome became iconic mainstays of the Mario universe.

And they've shown up in just about every game to follow, while inspiring hoards of other reptiles along the way! Taking their lead, Koopas across the land have since picked up implements like boomerangs, fireballs and sledgehammers with their respective siblings. Even Mario and Luigi got into the act, donning their own Hammer Bros. suits in Super Mario Bros. 3. It's enough to make a bystander shout "Please Hammer, don't hurt 'em!" out of concern for the Kingdom's collective safety. (Maybe that's when MC Hammer got the idea . . .)

BRO #2

THE LIGHT BROTHERS

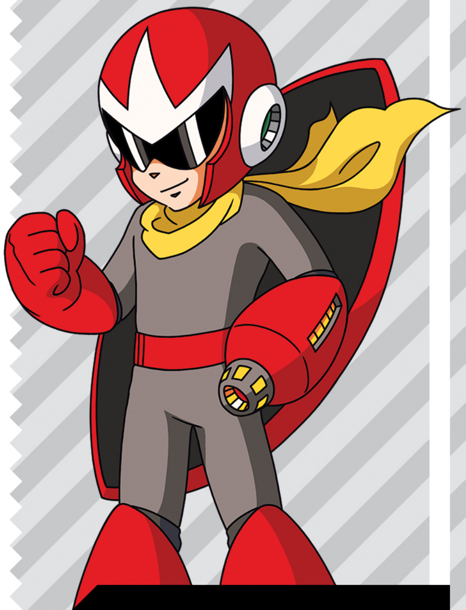


MEGA MAN

Mega Man and Proto Man — also known as Rock and Blues, and Dr. Light Numbers 001 and 000, respectively — have a relationship like no other. In Western media, Proto Man is the older brother of the Blue Bomber who left home before his little brother's creation, and ever since learning of his existence, Mega Man has hoped to form a stronger bond with his older sibling, and for him to come back home. But in a nod to mysterious characters from anime long ago, the Japanese version of Rock actually doesn't know that Blues is his brother at all!

In either case, the pair form a formidable duo of super fighting robots. Usually, Proto Man is content to hang back and let his younger brother handle things, thanks in part to a fault with his energy core, which prompted him to leave Dr. Light's laboratory in the first place. But when the situation calls for it, Proto Man is willing to put that aside and help save the day.

On other occasions, though, he's more than happy to scrap with his little bro bot to determine who's *really* the #1 son!



PROTO MAN

THE HIKARI BROTHERS

LAN HIKARI

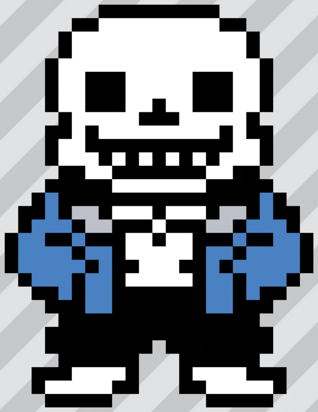
The brotherly rivalry between Mega Man and Proto Man spans universes, including all the way into the world of Mega Man Battle Network! But while MegaMan.EXE and ProtoMan.EXE will work both with and against each other on occasion, the two of them aren't even brothers at all!

Instead, MegaMan.EXE is surprisingly the twin brother of Lan Hikari! Lan had a twin named Hub who sadly died shortly after birth due to a rare heart condition — but their father, Yuichiro, was able to revive his deceased son as a NetNavi.

As twins who share the same DNA, Lan and MegaMan are uniquely suited to serve as a NetBattling duo. In fact, their genetic similarity allows the pair to fully synchronize — or go "Full Synchro" — and effectively act as one mind and one entity, turning both the NetOp and NetNavi into one fully united, highly formidable fighting force! Despite this, however, the two twins carry very different demeanors. Whereas MegaMan is polite and responsible, Lan is more of a slacker, often putting the two at odds.

MEGAMAN.EXE

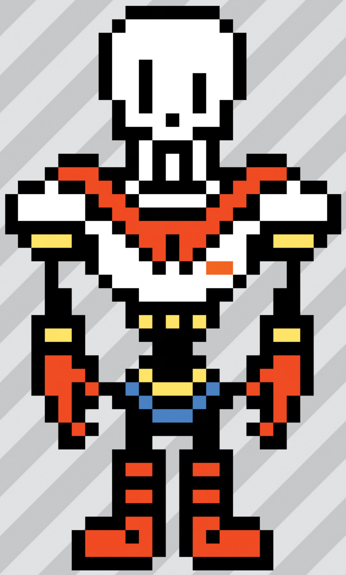
THE UNDERTALE BROTHERS



It's hard to deny the cultural impact that Undertale has had on the world, and two of its most recognizable characters, big brother Sans and little brother Papyrus, are two of the biggest reasons why. While on the surface they seem like a couple of big goof-balls who just want to be your friend, they have hidden mysteries lurking underneath – especially Sans.

Little bro Papyrus loves creating puzzles and spends his days enjoying spaghetti and dreaming about capturing a human and joining the Royal Guard like his hero, Undyne. He's a cool dude who only wants to make new friends and be popular, and even invites the hero over to his place to hang out.

Sans may like to stack hotdogs on your head or paint the eyepiece of a telescope black before asking you to look, but he's deadly serious about his mission to watch over the fallen human intruder. His more sinister side comes out if you decide to turn your journey into a Genocide Run – he's the final boss, and reserves his deadliest attacks just for you. You're gonna have a bad time, indeed.



SANS

PAPYRUS

THE FIGARO BROTHERS

Before Final Fantasy XVI's Clive and Joshua Rosfield, there was another set of royal siblings in the series: Final Fantasy VI's Edgar Roni Figaro and Sabin Rene Figaro, who were also twins! Edgar specializes in wielding tools and machinery to rain damage on enemy parties, while martial arts master Sabin's Blitz technique requires button sequences to pull off flashy displays of physical and elemental power.

In a poignant flashback that triggers when a party with both Sabin and Edgar revisit Figaro Castle, we see how their lives diverged when they were barely adults, after their father, the king, passes away after expressing his final wish for both his sons to rule the kingdom. When Sabin lashes out in grief, Edgar proposes that they decide their future with a coin toss: Whoever wins will get to choose if they want the throne, or freedom. (And if you have Sabin in your party when you recruit Setzer, you'll find out this is no ordinary coin . . .) Ten years later, the brothers become valuable allies to Terra, Locke and the other Returners in the battle to defeat Kefka and the Empire.

EDGAR

SABIN

THE NOOKLINGS

Chances are if you stop into a shop in the Animal Crossing series, you'll encounter this cheerful pair of twin tanukis, eager to help you with expert customer service! Timmy & Tommy Nook are the protégés of the series' original central character, Tom Nook, and look just like miniature versions of him – as well as looking nearly indistinguishably identical to one another.

Given their name and appearance, it's easy to assume that Tom Nook must be these boys' father, or uncle . . . or at least that they'd be related in *some* way. But it seems that Nintendo's official stance is that the relationship between them is purely professional – they're brothers to each other, but the elder Nook is simply their boss.

Though that doesn't stop them from looking up to him as a father figure! Timmy & Tommy emulate their idol so well, in fact, that in recent games they've entirely overtaken his original role: Tom Nook used to be the A.C. series' shopkeeper, but now that he's moved into running Resident Services, the store belongs entirely to these two twins!

TIMMY

TOMMY

THE BUBBLE BOBBLE BROTHERS

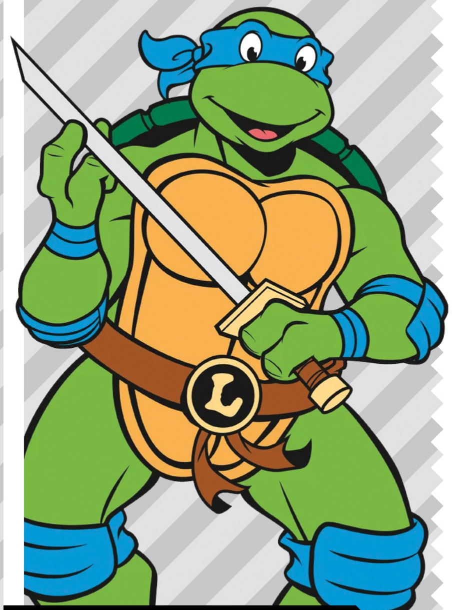
While most may know Bub & Bob from Bubble Bobble, the truth is that these little bubble dragons were once human boys! Their names are really Bubby and Bobby, and they're from Rainbow Village on Rainbow Island – they only became dragons due to an evil wizard's curse. That wizard also kidnapped their girlfriends, Betty and Patty, and their original game was about the brothers traversing through the Cave of Monsters to rescue them.

Bub & Bob have appeared in over 30 titles, ranging from platformers to puzzlers, and have plenty of cameos. In their dragon forms, the bros can create bubbles and trap their enemies inside them – they can then ride the bubbles to other areas or pop them to defeat the enclosed foes. As humans in the Rainbow Islands games, they can shoot rainbows that can defeat enemies or act as bridges. They can also drop the rainbows onto unsuspecting enemies from above! Their games are known for their difficulty, but also for their dual endings: If there aren't two players at the end, it's a sad ending. They only get a happy one as a pair!

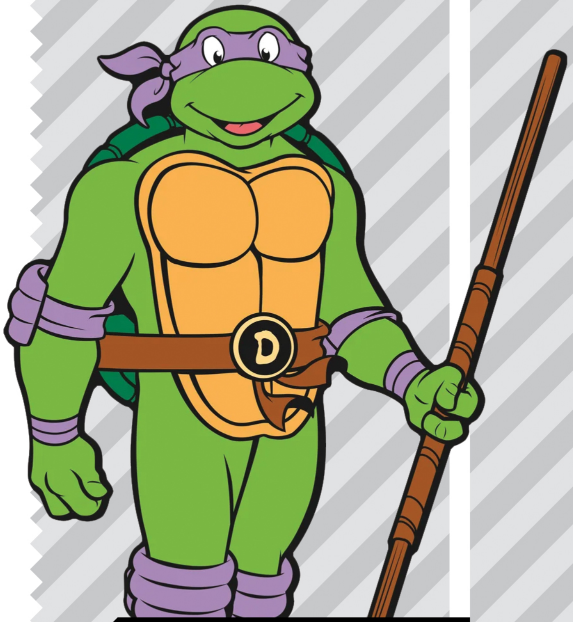
BUB

BOB

THE TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES



LEONARDO



DONATELLO

Once upon a time, four tiny turtles took a tumble down a storm drain. They ended up in the sewers of New York City – a disgusting place to be, for sure, but made even worse by the radioactive ooze they found themselves covered in! That suspicious substance mutated their reptilian DNA, transforming them into turtle/human hybrids. And giving them each a level of sentience that allowed for the development of unique personalities!

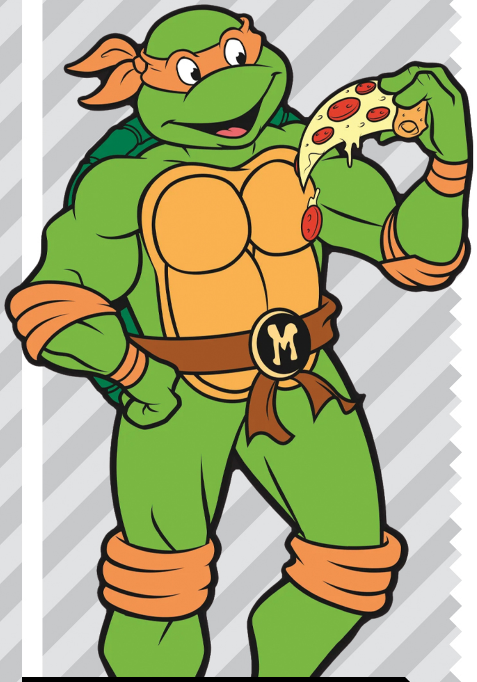
Leonardo is the leader of the team, taking charge of strategizing for the squad when they head into battle. The boys' adoptive father, Master Splinter (who is also a mutant himself), took them in, raised them and instructed them in the ways of the ninja – and Leonardo was always the most serious of his students. His steadfast resolve can sometimes mean he's the wet blanket of the bunch, though, and his brothers have to help him loosen up and have some fun.

Partying is no problem for Michelangelo, though! The youngest and most immature of the four, Mikey would rather be scarfing slices of pizza or playing the latest video games than fighting the forces of evil in the streets and sewers of New York. But that doesn't mean you should underestimate him in battle: He's a world-class 'chucker, able to bash baddies with his whirling nunchaku!

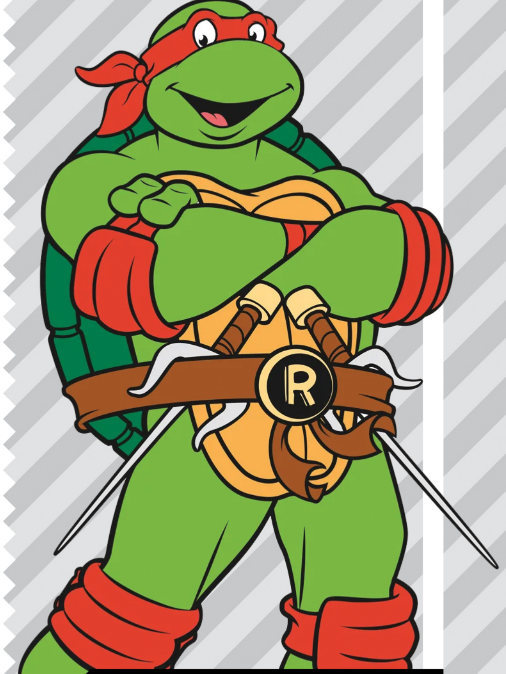
A less complicated weapon is wielded by Donatello: the bo staff (a.k.a. a big stick). The extreme simplicity of his chosen tool in combat is counterbalanced, though, by the extreme complexity of his mind! Donnie is the brains of the bunch, and he's constantly working to dream up new inventions to help his family succeed in saving the day.

Finally, there's Raphael. Originally a wise-cracking smart aleck in the first TMNT TV show, Raph has since evolved to become much more known for his rage. He's a hot head! Always losing his temper, storming off alone and getting in over his head in scraps where his pride has made him punch far too high above his weight class. Still, every group of warriors needs its barbarian, and when Raph's violent tendencies can be pointed in the right direction, he's a nearly unstoppable force.

That's the TMNT in a nutshell (or a turtle shell?), but what has been most interesting about these brothers is that they've been reinvented so many times over the last 40 years – and there's been something truly great about every new version of this same green team. What will this set of siblings look like and act like next? Who can say? But we'll always be seated to find out!



MICHELANGELO



RAPHAEL

THE DEVIL MAY CRY DUO

DANTE

VERGIL

The half-demon sons of the legendary dark knight Sparda just love to fight. Like many brothers, if either of them catch sight of the other, they will immediately launch into the most outlandish battle sequence you've ever seen in your life.

Dante embraces his human side and fights to save humans from rampaging devils. He's having the time of his life as he flips around all over the place, destroying demonic beasts with his weapons (which are made out of other demonic beasts!) and delivering ridiculous cornball quips. He may be part monster and have a tragic backstory, but he's not going to let that stop him from enjoying himself! Vergil, though, is obsessed with his demonic side and is angst incarnate, mainly because he feels demons should reign supreme and Dante keeps destroying said demons. Vergil takes himself 100% seriously at all times and is likely no fun at parties, since all he ever talks about is combat. He's also part monster and also has a tragic backstory, and he's absolutely going to let that stop him from enjoying anything other than trying to kill his brother.

THE TWIN SNAKES

SOLID SNAKE

LIQUID SNAKE

In the Metal Gear series, doctors took the body of the legendary mercenary Big Boss, then scienced some genes out of it to create an army of clone babies. One clone baby was given all of his dominant genes and the other all his recessive genes. (That isn't how cloning or genes or babies work, but as far as the Metal Gear brand is concerned, this makes the heroic Solid Snake and the villainous Liquid Snake into twin brothers.)

While it doesn't make scientific sense, the real point is that these brothers are two sides of the same coin. Solid Snake, supposedly the "weaker" of the pair, repeatedly saves the world even though he considers himself an eternal outsider and doesn't make many close connections with his fellow man. Liquid Snake, the "stronger" one, is a terrorist who wants to plunge the world into chaos, but also sometimes survives as a spirit living inside his own severed arm. Wow, it really makes you think about how two men with two very different ideologies can still be so similar, huh? . . . Or it just makes you think about how the story of the Metal Gear games is totally off the rails.

THE STREET FIGHTER BROTHERS

GOUKEN

Most brothers have parents, but this pair of martial artists didn't technically come from a Mom or a Dad. Instead, they were born from a prank! The evil Akuma (known as Gouki in Japan) and Gouken (his kinder, thought-to-be murdered older brother) are legends in the Street Fighter universe, standing tall as the franchise's masters of Shotokan Karate. But they may have never become canon if it weren't for 1992's April Fool's issue of Electronic Gaming Monthly. It featured fabricated screenshots and promotional artwork that led readers to believe that Sheng Long, Ryu and Ken's teacher, was hidden in Super Street Fighter. Many fans fell for the trick, generating mass hysteria. To capitalize on that hype, Capcom took the magazine's hoax, twisted the details and created Akuma for 1994's Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo. Then, 14 years later, they brought Gouken, Ken and Ryu's actual sensei, to the lineup of Street Fighter IV, using Sheng Long's fictional magazine look as the basis for his design. Knowing that these two god-like combatants were born from a myth in a vintage gaming magazine only adds to their mystique!

AKUMA

THE TWO SONS

NAIEE

These boys' tragic tale unfolds in Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons. The game centers primarily on the younger brother, Naiee, but the older brother, Naia, is also playable.

The game begins with them visiting their deceased mother's grave, and shortly after it's revealed that their father is gravely ill. The doctor needs water from the Tree of Life in order to save their father, so the pair set out to retrieve the MacGuffin. Various trials and tribulations await them, and the two need to work cooperatively to solve each unique situation's problem. Players will use Naia's strength and size to push things and help Naiee up to where he can climb. Naiee's size is also useful, as he can get into and out of tight spaces, and he's also good at distracting enemies so Naia can find away around them. In the Switch version, two players can control one brother apiece, for true co-op play.

To spoil the story, even though it came out in 2013, would be a crime. It's one of those games that really makes gamers question what games can be.

NAIA

THE BROTHERS FROM MOTHER

LUCAS

Ness' sister Tracy helped her bro out in EarthBound by storing his excess inventory, but Lucas and Claus both do some adventuring themselves in the game's sequel, the *still* unlocalized Mother 3. Like another younger bro starting with L, Lucas is rather timid and soft-spoken compared to his more outgoing twin. Claus meanwhile is a take-charge and clever kid who wants what's best for his family. Their folks must be proud seeing the twins wrestle dinos and send a pesky little Mole Cricket packing! And you've gotta give their Mom and Dad credit for that clever anagram-style naming of the boys!

. . . So, OK, there's really a lot more I can say here. I'm sure anyone who's finished Mother 3 just saw the images of these boys and was filled with an array of emotions. But even though it's nearly two decades old, I'm not about to spoil this awesome game right here! What I will say is that Lucas and Claus are part of a great story that I hope everyone can check out someday. But feel free to play as Lucas and his palette-swapped bro in Smash Bros. while we wait (and wait . . . and wait) . . . !

CLAUS

THE, UH . . . WARIO BROTHERS!?

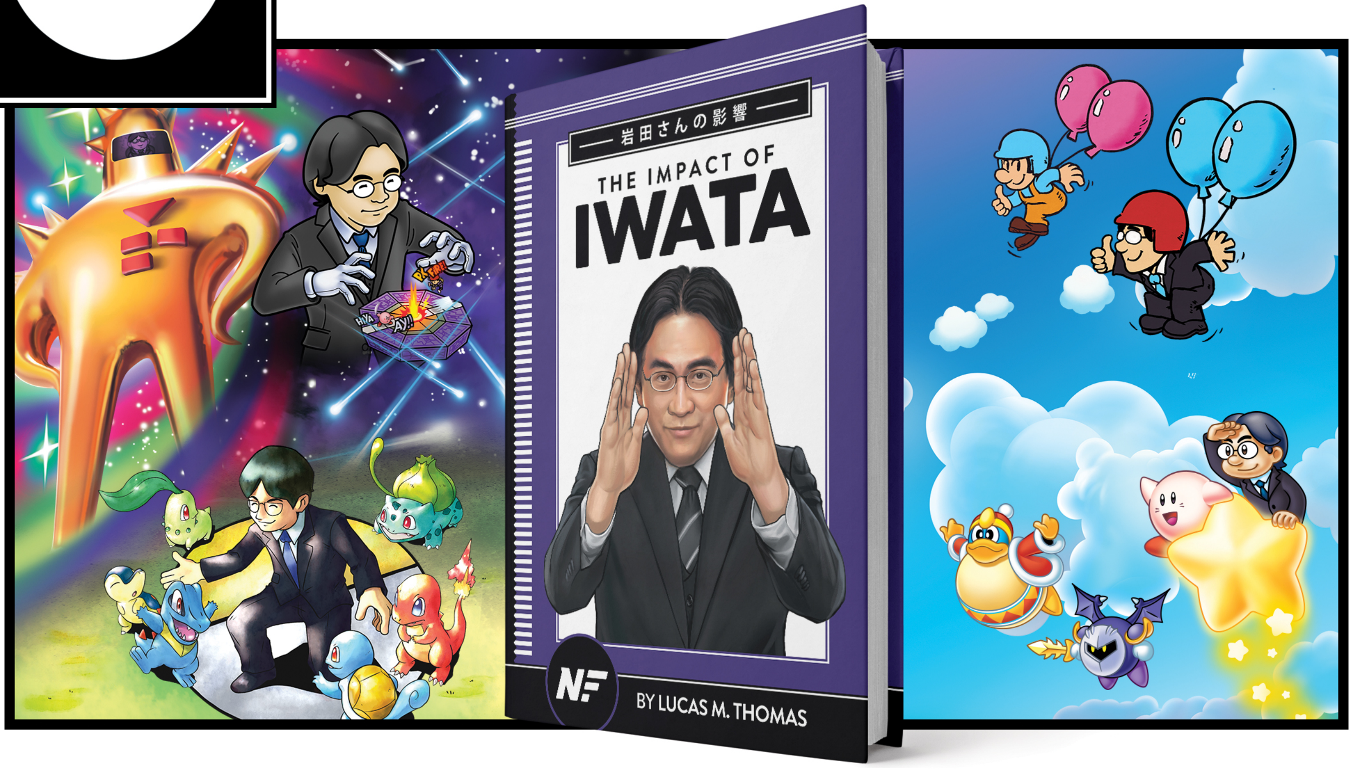
WARIO

WAA!! We've seen a lot of iconic bros already, but what about those of us who aren't lucky enough to have a brother? Sometimes it just comes down to finding a buddy who shares your interest in making people miserable . . . and who could easily pass as an alternate universe version of yourself! Despite looking the part, these wily wretches apparently *aren't* related. How is that even possible!?

Whatever circumstances led to this gruesome twosome, it all worked out in the end. Now Wario has a partner in crime who's willing to go all-in on sneering, scheming and harboring grudges against the Mario bros! Despite Waluigi's distinctive mixture of grumbling and grace, the two don't actually seem to DO much. After a short-lived solo career as a villain, Wario cooked up a couple of harebrained schemes with Waluigi in a handful of the sports games, but they've been pretty benign ever since. I hungrily await the day when these two pseudo-bros live up to their potential for causing mass chaos. Wario is full of beans and Waluigi has plenty of chips on his shoulder, so let's see this disturbing duo get into real trouble!

WALUIGI

THE MAKING OF



MR. IWATA'S BIRTHDAY is coming up again soon.

He was born on December 6, 1959. That means on this December 6 just ahead, here in 2024, he would have turned 65 years old. The ages that end in 5s and 0s always feel like the big ones, but this one may hit a little harder since it'll also be ushering us toward the 10-year anniversary of when he said goodbye – since Satoru Iwata was 55 when he passed away.

Maybe reflecting on numbers and dates and anniversaries is unhelpful for you. For me, though, just thinking like that and trying to put some structure to the timeline of things helps me process. Helps me grieve, then begin to move on.

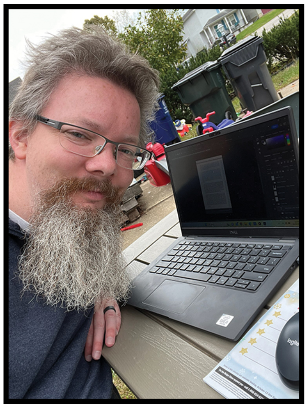
After Mr. Iwata passed away in the summer of 2015, we dedicated our next NF issue to his memory. We made "Thank You, Mr. Iwata" as our 17th edition, filling it with retrospectives on games he helped to bring to life during his career at HAL and Nintendo, words of wisdom he'd shared in interviews over the years and fan art from crestfallen gamers lamenting his loss. I was proud of the work we did in that issue – and I remain so to this day.

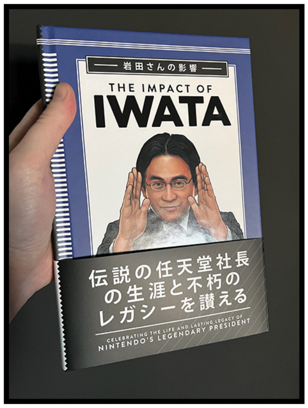
But as the years passed by after that point, as Nintendo moved on without their leader and as mentions of Mr. Iwata online began to dwindle day by day, I felt like our work was unfinished. I wanted to do more.

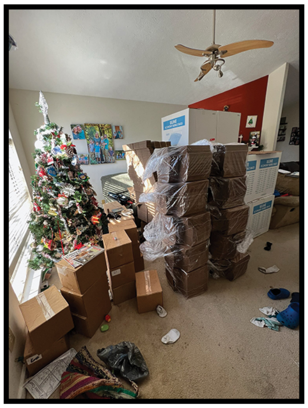
We hit our own 10-year anniversary in January 2023, marking a full decade of publishing this very magazine – and as part of reaching that elevated age, I made the announcement that NF was expanding into book publishing! I'd been wanting to do more focused writing projects for a while – to be able to really spotlight single subjects without having to split attention to include previews and reviews and the usual bimonthly magazine content – and the biggest motivating force driving me toward that goal was my feeling that we could craft a fuller, more complete celebration of Mr. Iwata's life and career. So work began in earnest on The Impact of Iwata!

I already had a lot of the structure of the book in place at that point, as well as several early chapters already written – I didn't blindly promise that we'd get into books without proving to myself first that we could. But after making that announcement, I was fully committed! No turning back!

Most of the work that went into "The Making of The Impact of Iwata" was unglamorous. Throughout most of 2023 it largely involved me taking my laptop outside, or to a library, or to some other reasonably peaceful and quiet place and then typing away, getting the words out of my brain and onto the pages. The traditional, usual, stereotypical process of writing a book. No major surprises there!







But if you've cracked open a copy of The Impact of Iwata, you'll know that there's much more inside than just my words. There are quotes and screenshots and dozens of pieces of unique artwork illustrated by dozens of artists who aren't Lucas M. Thomas!

I knew words alone wouldn't fully convey Mr. Iwata's artistry and playful personality, so I got in touch with several different artists and commissioned them to craft bold, colorful illustrations to introduce each of the book's 16 different chapters. Some of the art already existed – the five pieces seen on the left, representing Mr. Iwata's work on the Kirby series, Balloon Fight, EarthBound, Pokémon and Super Smash Bros., were first made in 2015 for NF Issue #17. But they were joined by new works, all led by the great piece seen directly above, by D.M. Cumbo, depicting Mr. Iwata in his childhood years. That piece appears as the lead-in to Chapter 1, and it was inspired by my favorite story that was uncovered during the research phase for the book: Mr. Iwata participated in the opening ceremony of the 1972 Winter Olympics! He was one of 100 kids chosen to be "balloon skaters" to help kick off the Games!

Tony Ponce gets the credit for first finding that fun factoid, as he helped out by reading Japanese resources and relaying the information to me. (I'm not far enough along in my Duolingo lessons to be able to read them myself quite yet.) The entire Nintendo Force team was invaluable throughout the whole process of creating the book!

And when it was done and actual, physical copies were manufactured? That's when the home team stepped in to help the most! Following our wildly successful Kickstarter campaign to raise the funds to be able to print this book and really bring it into existence, I worked with a printing company here in the States that I knew had previously made some of Fangamer's books. What I didn't know, though, was that they had a facility located just 10 miles away from my home! I thought the books would be printed up in Minnesota and then have to be freight-shipped to me here in Kentucky, but it turns out I was able to just drive over to the manufacturing plant in person!

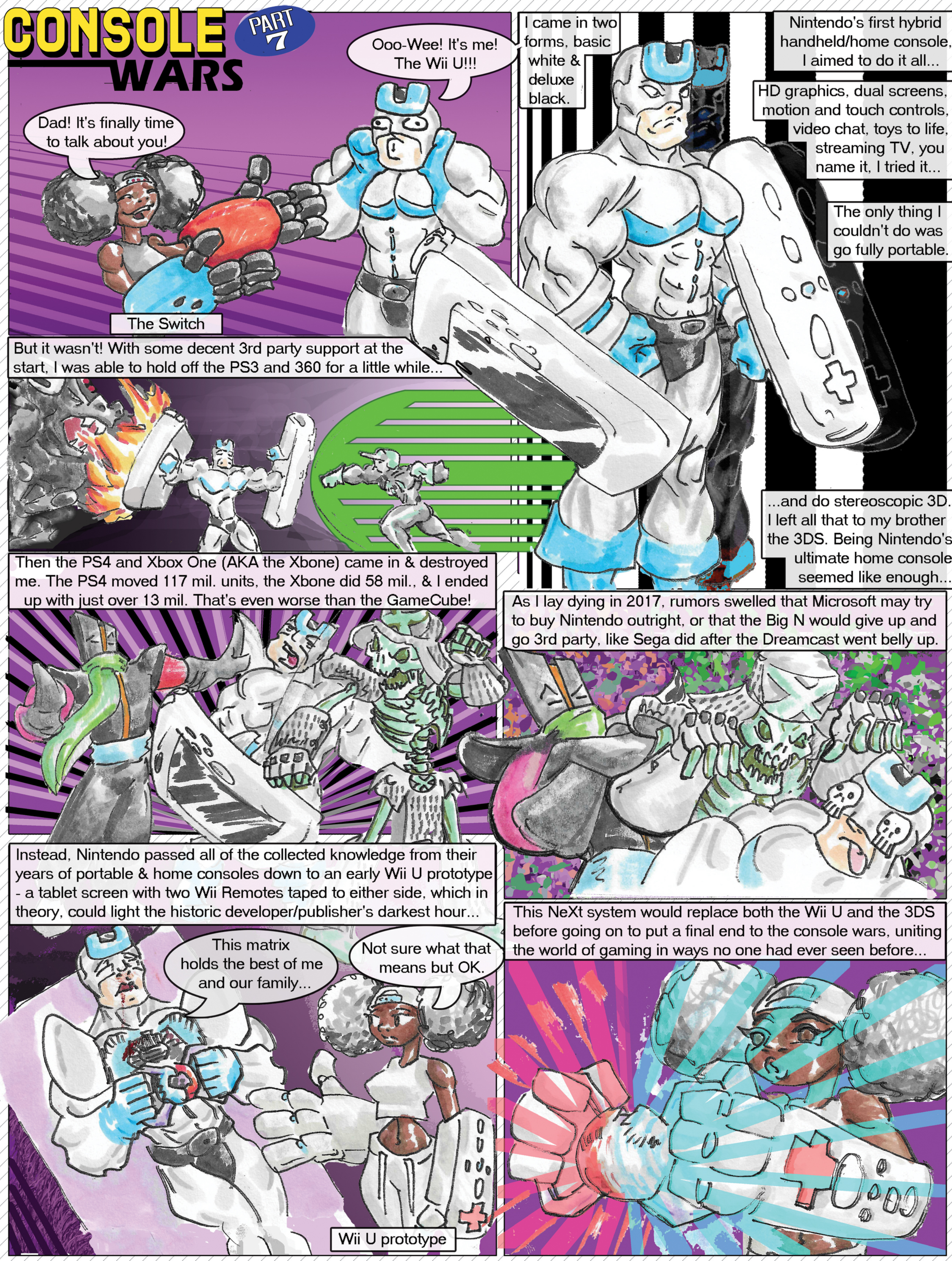
Carter was my first assistant, going with me on a facility tour to see the books being printed and assembled firsthand. It was fascinating to watch.

When the books were done and boxed up, I went and rented myself a box truck! The rest of the boys (and a family friend or two) helped load hundreds of boxes of books into an average, everyday U-Haul, and we brought them back home to sort them and ship them!

This was right around Christmas time last year, and let me tell you, our house was a full-on mess. (More so than usual.) The sheer volume of shipping materials – mailer boxes and bubble wrap envelopes and tape – was immense, and towered over our poor Christmas tree in the living room. The whole family got involved in boxing up the books to fulfill backers' orders, with the first waves going out before the end of that year and the rest happening through the early months of 2024. (We learned a lot through the whole process, so future fulfillment phases will go faster!)

I recognize that authors usually don't physically handle and ship every copy of their own books – probably because they don't want their homes overrun like ours was. But I wanted the mess. I wanted to make memories for our boys. I wanted to make them smile with the silliness of seeing our house jam-packed with books written about a man who spent his whole life making smiles for others. That was the real "Making Of" in the end!

Special thanks to my wife for her patience and understanding all the way through – as well as her ongoing support throughout this year, as she got the boys out of the house again and again as I worked to record the audiobook version! That last piece of the puzzle is now finished too, though, so work on The Impact of Iwata is now complete. And it feels complete. And I hope this book has helped to keep Mr. Iwata's memory alive! **– LUCAS**



BY JONATHAN HOLMES

MARIO & LUIGI: BROTHERSHIP

The siblings' co-starring series sets sails again with a surprise sixth installment!

WORKING AT ALPHADREAM turned out to be a nightmare.

The company was founded just a few days past Y2K, officially beginning operations in January 2000. A new game development team, AlphaDream was composed, at first, primarily by former employees of Square. (So, in other words, RPG experts.) Their new name was even chosen as a tongue-in-cheek reference to that previous employer: Square was known for the world-famous Final Fantasy series, so what's the opposite of Final? First! (Or "Alpha.") And what's a synonym for Fantasy? There you go. These devs had left Final Fantasy behind in order to pursue their own first fantasy as an all-new team: their AlphaDream.

Tapping into their role-playing expertise, they pursued work on their own RPGs right away. Their first effort was called Koto Battle: Tengai no Moribito, and it was a Game Boy Color RPG that rode the wave of popularity produced by Pokémon and offered its own spin on monster battling and card collecting. It was a solid first release, and Nintendo quickly took notice.

So their second title was published as a first-party product! Originally meant to be another GBC RPG called Gimmick Land, it got pushed back and reworked as the Game Boy Advance became Nintendo's reigning portable, and ultimately became the colorful Tomato Adventure. (See a bit of it on Page 57 up ahead!) Again, their work turned out to be pretty great, and again, the talents of AlphaDream's team were recognized by the top brass at the Big N. So they were entrusted with more!

For just their third-ever project as a dev studio, AlphaDream was gifted the rights to work in Mario's world. Talk about a dream project! And, yet again, they proved themselves up to the task – Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga, first released on GBA in 2003, was quirky, inventive, unique and totally fun, and it set the studio on a path of making sequels to try to recapture its excellence for over a decade afterward.

Isn't all of that just the best best-case scenario possible? To start your own new game development studio, and to be so good at what you do that Nintendo's top executives bring you in and let you go wild with their most closely guarded and highly valued IP? What in the world could be better than that? What could possibly go wrong?

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: ILCA (WITH SOME ORIGINAL ALPHADREAM TEAM MEMBERS)
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 7, 2024 RATING: E

AlphaDream filed for bankruptcy on October 1, 2019. They shuttered their studio just three months shy of their 20th anniversary, having been somehow unable to stay afloat even with what seemed to be, from the outside looking in, the sweetest setup possible for a second-party development studio.

So . . . what happened? Money mismanagement? Declining sales for the Mario & Luigi sequels? Unspoken interpersonal conflicts between the employees? We've never gotten the full story (and maybe we never will), but after the release of the fifth Mario & Luigi game, Paper Jam, in 2015, it quickly became clear that the studio was struggling. They rushed out a pair of desperate remakes of their biggest past hits – Superstar Saga got one in 2017, and Bowser's Inside Story got another in January 2019 – but, nine months after that, AlphaDream was done.

And Nintendo didn't swoop in to save them! They would've had plenty in the warchest to be able to pull the studio out of whatever fiscal whirlpool they'd found themselves in, but they declined, allowing the bankruptcy to move forward . . . which also meant the Mario & Luigi series was over.

RESURRECTION & REBIRTH

. . . Or so we thought!

Now, Nintendo has built up quite a reputation for shocking reveals. Big, out-of-nowhere surprise announcements are the bread and butter of the Nintendo Direct video presentations, and it's always a joy to be left sitting slack-jawed in awe of some truly unexpected and unforeseen game reveal. Even still, I was personally totally taken aback on June 18 this year, when they gave us our first look at this game – not just a brand-new sequel, but a sequel in a series that so many of us thought would never be able to get any new sequels ever again!

Mario & Luigi: Brothership launches onto the Nintendo Switch very soon – and when it does, it will not only serve as its series' sixth installment, but also bring the whole brand back from the dead!

So . . . how is this happening? Well, it was of course always Nintendo's option to continue this franchise with a different development studio at the helm. We all just thought that, out of respect for the original dev team, they wouldn't ever choose to do that. And they aren't! Because the original devs *are* still involved . . . they're just working with a different studio now.

Nintendo let the AlphaDream *name* die, yes. I'm sure there was good reason for that, from a business perspective. But the true talent of the team was never in that name (as fun as it was), but in the team members themselves, of course. So critical creative minds who helped shape the earlier installments in this same series have just moved over to work alongside the team at ILCA (previously responsible for Pokémon Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl), and they're back to doing what they used to: sending Mario and Luigi on insane adventures full of oddball obstacles that only the strength of two brothers working in tandem can overcome!

IT TAKES TWO

If you've never played a Mario & Luigi game before, boy, are you in for quite a treat! Nintendo has presented plenty of different adventures starring these same characters over the last four decades, but this specific series – with that critically important ampersand connecting the brothers' names – is set apart from all the rest.

In Mario & Luigi games, you play as Mario and Luigi . . . but at the same time. Simultaneously! They don't take turns. You don't have two players each taking command of a single brother and working together. No, it's a solo, one-player experience, but with two tag-teaming, concurrently controllable playable heroes.

It's a little weird to get used to! It certainly makes an odd first impression, as Mario leads the duo when moving around on the screen and Luigi tags along behind him . . . but each brother has his own dedicated jump button. So, when you approach a gap between platforms and want to leap over it to the other side, you must first press Mario's jump button and then quickly rock your thumb over to tap Luigi's a split-second later, causing him to follow right behind his big bro.

And that's just the beginning! Every interactive experience in these games is built with two heroes in mind, so you're constantly presented with puzzles that demand precise timing of both bros' movements to solve, or scenes where they must briefly travel down separate paths before coming back together again. Traversal is upgraded and enhanced by "Bros. Moves" you learn along the way. One is pictured just below: In it, Mario and Luigi join hands and spin their bodies so quickly that they temporarily turn into a kind of UFO to hover over pits!

BROTHERS ON THE BATTLEFIELD

The two-hero tandem control idea is most fully realized in these games' turn-based battles. Again, you've got a couple of buttons assigned to Mario and others that move Luigi, and it's a constant dance between the two as each bro moves forward to attack their enemies, then reacts to those foes' counterattacks.

For example, say a Goomba takes off on a trot toward our heroes. You have to quickly recognize which of the two is being targeted, then press his jump button with the proper timing. If you fail, he'll get hit and take damage! But if you time it right, he'll leap into the air to dodge, keeping his HP intact . . . and probably also landing right on top of that Goomba's noggin, turning the tables and dealing damage to it instead.

Combat starts out with easy attacks to dodge like that example, but then grows to become crazily complex by the end of each Mario & Luigi RPG adventure. You'll have enemies who fire a dozen projectiles at you at a time. Baddies that target both bros in the same assault. Some that try to trick you, beelining toward Mario before then swerving to hit Luigi instead! You'll need sharp reflexes!

SETTING SAIL ON SHIPSHAPE

OK, so those preceding sections serve as an overall overview of what the Mario & Luigi games are all about at their gameplay core. But what does this new Brothership game have in store? What's unique and different about this new sequel specifically?

Nintendo describes this sixth series installment as a "seafaring adventure" – meaning the Mario brothers are about to become the Mario sailors! (It's too bad this game wasn't revealed until after we published our "Too Much Water" issue earlier this year!)

In Brothership, the brothers' ship is a gigantic, mobile land mass named Shipshape Island – kind of a boat built out of dirt and plant life. Shipshape Island wasn't always an isolated lump of land, though. It used to be a part of a whole continent called Concordia!

As the adventure begins, we get to witness the catastrophic events that caused Concordia to be split apart – forming Shipshape Island as well as several other islands that then get scattered across the sea. It seems that a villain named Zokket has inflicted some kind of curse or plague or just outright destroyed the Uni-Tree, the central "world tree" that used to keep all these pieces of land connected!

Perhaps Zokket (whose name sounds like socket, like an electrical socket), is an anti-nature antagonist? Does he just love all things electrical and hate living plant life, so he attacks the Uni-Tree in disgust of what it stands for? He leads an army of minions who all are similarly themed and named in reference to electrical items, like the trio of Ecks, Ten and Shun (pictured below) who call themselves the Extension Corps as a group.

But wait! My electricity vs. nature story theory loses voltage when you also take a look at Mario and Luigi's allies in this adventure. They too are made to look like electrical items like plugs and outlets!

Our most important NPC appears to be Snoutlet, a little fellow who looks like a flying pig – but apparently he takes incredible offense to anyone making that connection. "I'M NOT A PIG!" he regularly exclaims. He'll be the tag-along helper/guide character this time around, taking over that role from Starlow, who hovered after our heroes in previous Mario & Luigi games. (But Starlow isn't totally sidelined – she's still appearing in this sequel too, just palling around with Princess Peach instead.) Snoutlet will travel underneath Luigi's cap.

Also prominently important to the plot is a cute little outlet-faced girl named Connie. She's the caretaker of the Uni-Tree, and is of course in severe distress following Zokket's assault and the scattering of Concordia. She'll ask for our heroes' help to reunite the entirety of the continent, one island at a time!

PLUGGING THE ISLANDS BACK IN

You know how many kinds of flowers grow from flower bulbs? Well, I have a feeling that this game's developers might have made that word connection – flower bulb, light bulb – and decided to design a whole game world where plants and electricity are totally intertwined. Because the Uni-Tree isn't just a tree. It's also kind of a gigantic lamp, and Concordia's islands are all supposed to stay connected with huge power cords!

Again, I don't have a full understanding of the story here in advance of the final game's release, but the overlap of plants and electricity is certainly interesting and unexpected. It's a weird mix – it makes me think of half-Electric and half-Grass Pokémon, then remember there aren't many of those. But the Mario brothers won't be bothered. It's just another job to do!

So the gameplay loop of Mario & Luigi: Brothership appears to be setting sail across one of several different seas aboard Shipshape Island, keeping a lookout for any of the lost and adrift other islands of Concordia out there floating on the water. Then, when you find one, the brothers will launch themselves over to it, have some adventures there solving puzzles and beating bad guys and a boss or two, and eventually reach a point of connection where they can grab hold of the gigantic power cord that used to connect the island to the Uni-Tree. They'll then blast back to Shipshape Island and plug the lost land mass back into the central hub! Rinsing and repeating this process will ultimately reassemble the entire continent.

. . . It sounds like a lot of work! And Mario and Luigi got their start working together as plumbers, you know. They may not be properly licensed to serve as electricians for a job of this magnitude. (But I won't tell the Better Business Bureau if you don't either!)

STILL PLAYING THEIR ROLES

Remember, of course, that throughout all of this adventuring, Mario and Luigi will be getting stronger, increasing their stats and gaining new attacks. This is still a role-playing game, and that means managing items and equipment, keeping a keen eye on your HP and MP meters in battle and all the other classic tropes we covered in our ABCs of RPGs issue exactly one year ago. (Boy, between the Super Mario RPG remake, the Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door remake and now this new Mario & Luigi sequel, we may just be in a new golden age of Mario role-playing!)

A new gameplay wrinkle that will allow for another level of role-playing customization in Brothership is the introduction of Battle Plugs. These are a new category of attack-enhancing upgrades that can boost your damage output in battle!

For example, one Battle Plug is the "Surprise Iron Ball." With it equipped, any time you score an "EXCELLENT!" rating by having perfect timing on an attack, a spiked iron ball will fall from the sky and land on your foe, causing them to suffer an extra bit of damage.

Another Battle Plug is "Kaboom Attack." It rewards EXCELLENT hits by triggering a shockwave, so enemies standing near to the one you've hit will also take some splash damage.

The Plugs will add just an extra bit of force to your fights. Bros. Attacks, though, remain this series' go-to techniques for dealing massive damage in battles!

Just like using both bros' buttons to travel the world in tandem and attack and dodge through the normal parts of combat encounters, you'll again be called upon to prove your mastery of two-character control during the flashy, major-damage-dealing Bros. Attacks. An example of one of those is "Red Shell" – it begins with Mario kicking a red Koopa shell toward Luigi. Luigi then kicks it back to Mario. And so on and so forth, passing the shell back and forth between them multiple times . . . and adding damage to its output every time. With several well-timed passes between the bros before you take the final kick to send the shell sailing straight at the targeted foe's face, you can rack up a huge amount of damage – much more than the standard Jump or Hammer attacks will get you. Bros. Attacks, though, do cost MP to use. (So feel free to think of them as magic spells!)

LOGICAL LUIGI?

Lastly, Mario & Luigi: Brothership is introducing another new aspect to the series' gameplay that looks hilarious: Luigi Logic!

In certain scenes and situations, the Mario brothers will find themselves stuck and seemingly unable to move forward. But in those moments, Luigi's brilliant mind will kick into overdrive! His mental gears will turn until he works out a wild solution that will solve all their problems, then he'll instantly put it into practice.

One example there is Luigi coming up with the idea to wear a barrel over his body during a stealth mission – and using himself as a shield so Mario can creep through the area undetected. In another instance, the heroes are faced with a fence that they can't seem to get past – until Luigi Logic activates and he just decides to hurl himself bodily through a too-small gap and *squeeze* until he makes it to the other side. (Luigi, you're insane. And that's why we love you.)

SETTING SAIL SOON!

There's much more in store in this surprise sequel to a once-dead series, and we won't have to wait long: It goes on sale on November 7! (It might be out already by the time you read this!) I, for one, can't wait. AlphaDream's loss five years ago was so sudden – I'm thrilled that this series got electro-shocked back to life! **– LUCAS**

SNOW BROS. WONDERLAND

A frigid fraternal friendship takes on an all-new form!

THE SNOW BROTHERS are back!

Good ol' Nick and Tom, everyone's favorite princes of Snow Land, are about to embark on an all-new 3D platforming adventure. "But wait," I hear you say. "Who the heck are the Snow Brothers? I've never heard of these guys before!" If that's in fact what you said, let's cover a bit of history.

Snow Bros. was originally released as an arcade game back in 1990, then ported to NES and Game Boy by Capcom, and later to the Mega Drive in Japan by Tengen. It plays fairly similarly to Bubble Bobble, in that it's a co-op, single-screen game where you have to toss snowballs at enemies to trap them, then roll them off the screen before moving on to the next stage. It never really took off in the U.S., but was reasonably successful in Japan, where it got an intensely bizarre followup called Snow Bros. 2: With New Elves.

About two years ago, a remaster of the arcade original was released on Switch as Snow Bros. Special, which didn't exactly please longtime fans, nor did it do much in terms of attracting new players. As for the existing story, well that's an entirely different ball of wax . . . *err*, snow. Every version of the game has presented completely different origin stories, but they all converge on the same basic premise: There are two snowmen named Nick and Tom who throw snowballs at monsters to save a pair of princesses.

And that more or less brings you up to speed, with Snow Bros. Wonderland right around the corner aiming to breathe new life into this cult-classic brand. Instead of trying to build on its arcade roots, though, Wonderland looks to take the basic gameplay elements of the original and apply them to a 3D platforming action game.

Taking a page out of Super Mario 3D World's playbook, Wonderland is presented from a pseudo top-down perspective. You still throw snowballs at enemies to trap them and roll them around, but you now do that in wide-open 3D spaces.

Also like Super Mario 3D World, couch co-op for up to four players is included. (Though no word on whether Players 3 and 4 are new brothers.)

In the relatively brief footage we've seen in trailers, some classic enemies and bosses from the original seem to be making return appearances, and I'm sure there will be plenty of new surprises along for the ride. The music seems catchy, the visuals are clean, and the Brothers themselves have gotten a decent modern makeover.

Trying to evolve a basic arcade concept into something more modern is always a risk. This isn't just taking the formula of the original game and putting it into 3D environments – it's making a whole new kind of game out of them, which doesn't necessarily guarantee fans of the series will enjoy the results.

Whether or not Wonderland finally gets the Snow Brothers on the same stage as many of gaming's other platforming greats remains to be seen, but if what they've shown off so far is any indication, it looks like we'll be in for a chilly good time. **– KRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: BITWAVE GAMES & CLEAR RIVER GAMES
DEVELOPER: TATSUJIN RELEASE: NOVEMBER 28, 2024 RATING: RP

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS HD

For Retro's DKC reboot, will the third time be the charm?

DONKEY AND DIDDY aren't brothers.

Not technically, at least. That's fairly easy to tell just by looking at them — since they belong to two separate species of simian. But the big, burly gorilla and his shorter, speedier monkey pal have shared so many adventures and appeared alongside one another in so many spin-off games over the last three decades that they've built up an incredibly brotherly bond. They really are brothers in everything but name!

. . . But wait. They have the same last name. See? It's confusing!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: RETRO STUDIOS & FOREVER ENTERTAINMENT RELEASE: JANUARY 16, 2025 RATING: E

Whether you consider Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong to be siblings or just best friends, the fact remains that they are one of Nintendo's most iconic duos — and they began their journeys together almost exactly 30 years ago as we send this issue to press, since the original Donkey Kong Country was first released on the SNES back in November 1994. It was a trailblazing game, most remembered for its wildly advanced graphics compared to all other contemporaries of that era — its developers at Rare had used a bold new process of 3D modeling to make all of the game's characters and environments, and the result was an eye-awing visual masterpiece that tricked players of the day into thinking the aging SNES had more hidden power than it really did.

I wanted to explain that the DKC series began by making its visual presentation its key selling point 30 years ago, because now, decades later, we find ourselves facing similar circumstances: Nintendo is once again presenting a platformer starring big D.K. and little D.K., and once again its graphics are being held up as the main reason why anyone might want to buy.

RETURNS RETURNS (AGAIN)

Donkey Kong Country Returns HD will be the third release for this same quest. It was originally launched as a Wii exclusive in November 2010, then got an encore appearance in portable form just two and a half years later via Donkey Kong Country Returns 3D for the Nintendo 3DS. Visual appeal was a selling point for that port too, since Nintendo could entice both new players and double-dipping owners of the Wii original with the prospect of seeing their "3D" computer-generated DKC series in actual eye-popping stereoscopic 3D for the first time ever.

My interest was drawn by a different aspect of the portable port back then, though: It used traditional button controls for gameplay! The Wii version — as so many Wii games did — had some gameplay actions mapped to "waggling" the motion-sensing Wii Remote controller, which was imprecise and tiresome. So I was really looking forward to playing the game a second time using only simple button inputs to direct the Kongs.

I ended up reviewing Donkey Kong Country Returns 3D in our third issue of Nintendo Force, released in May 2013. And my conclusion was that it was a better version play-wise, thanks to its elimination of waggle — but it also was a lesser experience visually, since the low-res 3DS screen, despite its glasses-free 3D tech, made the game world lose a lot of detail.

Ultimately I declared that neither of the two versions was definitive – leaving the door open for some future third release to come along and offer the best of both worlds, gameplay *and* graphics, and establish itself as the one and only best way to play. So . . . will DKC Returns HD do that?

HD ANXIETY

Control-wise we should be all set for a second time, as this new version isn't going to make you waggle your Joy-Cons to trigger Donkey Kong's ground slaps or anything like that. But eagle-eyed, tech-obsessed fans instantly clocked that the promised HD overhaul may not quite be up to Nintendo's high standard of quality. (At least, it wasn't as of its reveal to the public last summer.)

Several visual effects appeared to be altered or entirely missing in the first footage of DKCRHD, which is worrisome. Many of them are things most players wouldn't instantly notice, but some examples I've seen shared online are egregiously worse than the oldest Wii version. Nintendo apparently outsourced development of this new port to Forever Entertainment, a studio that has headlined tons of ports and remakes in the past . . . but has also never been entrusted with a first-party Nintendo brand before. The biggest game we've covered from them in our pages in the past was the remake of Panzer Dragoon released four and a half years ago. It scored a 7 out of 10. (Not a big confidence booster there.) Still, if Nintendo's executives have seen fit to hand over the keys to DK's treehouse to this team, I won't pass any judgment ahead of time.

CENTERPIECE OF THE SERIES

My main cause for concern regarding the quality of this release is that DKC Returns has become an unexpectedly important game for this franchise.

Nintendo has invested heavily in the vision of Donkey Kong and his world that was first brought to life in this specific installment in his series! The jungle and temple aesthetics first seen here informed how the kingdom of the Kongs was presented in The Super Mario Bros. Movie. And, even beyond that, the Donkey Kong section of the Super Nintendo World theme park has been modeled after this same game as well! Even its enemies – the Tiki Tak Tribe, a band of evil, floating musical instruments – have been elevated above and beyond the Kremlings, the crocodile-like critters who served as the foes in all three of the SNES DKCs and Donkey Kong 64.

So Returns has a lot riding on it! Not just another re-release, this game really needs to be able to serve as the centerpiece of the Donkey Kong brand as a whole, for at least a while – at least until some brand-new sequel would finally be released to take its place. And if it tanks? If it's ignored because of underbaked HD visuals or poor critical reception or the fact that it's releasing so late into the Switch life cycle that gamers will have already moved on to Switch 2? Well, then Nintendo's first-ever big-name brand – the same brand that introduced Mario to the world – might just be in trouble, and might not get that new sequel greenlit at all.

CONCLUSION

OK, OK. Deep breath.

Thanks for letting me get all that out of my system! You know I always want Nintendo's brands to all be at their best, and as someone who was there to witness the origins of Donkey and Diddy's brotherly bond 30 years ago, I've felt invested in their success ever since. Come on back in our next issue when I'll cast these worries aside and do a proper preview! **– LUCAS**

STRAY

Little Kitty, Robot City.

CAT PEOPLE, REJOICE! After the release of Little Kitty, Big City earlier this year, another feline-focused experience will soon make its way to the Nintendo Switch.

Stray, the critically acclaimed title from BlueTwelve Studio, will release on November 19 for the Switch. This adventure game, in which you take on the role of a cute orange cat in a decaying city, was initially released on PlayStation 4 and 5 and PC in 2022.

That year, Stray garnered a hefty amount of praise from players and critics alike. (It's currently sitting at "83" on Metacritic). It also earned a Game of the Year nomination and took home Best Independent Game and Best Debut Indie at the 2022 Game Awards.

In Stray, you control a stray cat who ends up in a run-down underground city inhabited by robots (who are mostly friendly), and mutant bacteria (who won't hesitate to make you their next meal).

The goal is to return to the surface. It won't be easy, but with the help of a friendly drone to guide you and your natural cat-like reflexes, you've got the tools it will take to survive and escape.

Stray's gameplay involves exploring this post-apocalyptic setting to uncover clues about what happened there, some platforming elements as you leap and scurry around obstacles, solving environmental puzzles to make progress forward, and some combat and stealth elements.

Of course, you can also take part in more stereotypical cat-like activities such as finding the perfect napping spot, snuggling up to NPCs for some pets, and meowing to your heart's content, too. Other activities include hunting down optional collectables and taking on tasks from different robots.

Whether you're a devoted cat lover and/or missed out on Stray when it came to other platforms a few years ago, it now feels like the purrfect time to give this one a try!
– MAGGIE

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ANNAPURNA INT. DEVELOPER: BLUETWELVE STUDIO RELEASE: NOVEMBER 19, 2024 RATING: E10+

TALES OF GRACES F REMASTERED

One of the Tales never previously told to Western Nintendo fans.

THE "TALES OF" SERIES will celebrate its 30th anniversary in December, and in honor of that milestone, some of its less accessible titles will receive remasters in the near future!

Dubbed the Tales of Remastered Project, the goal is to bring these games to current platforms, so fans old and new can play them more easily.

Tales of Graces f Remastered will be the first game of this project and feature an enhanced version of the action RPG that initially released in 2009 in Japan on the Wii. The game eventually came West in 2012 on PlayStation 3.

The remaster will include several new features, including updated visuals, quality-of-life improvements like autosave and skip functions, and the ability to turn enemy encounters on and off in the field or in dungeons.

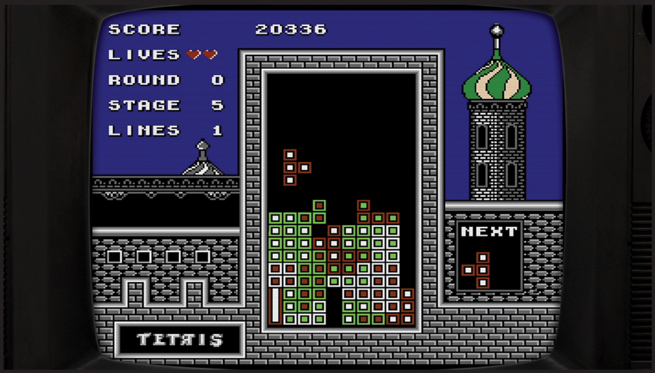
It will also have some scenes that will be localized into English for the first time, more than 80 DLC packs and items, and the after-story, Lineage and Legacies, that takes place six months after the events of the main game.

Tales of Graces employs a real-time action combat system, where you fill up the Chain Capacity gauge to deploy special skills called Artes. It tells the story of Asbel and his comrades on the planet Ephinea, as three different countries vie for control and political strife ensues.

But, intriguingly, the game doesn't begin in the midst of that strife – instead, the opening hours are spent getting to know the main cast while they're still children!

It's always exciting to see older games get another chance on modern consoles, and I can't wait to see what the next Tales remaster will be. Here's hoping it's Xillia!
– MAGGIE

SWITCH PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO DEVELOPER: TOSE RELEASE: JANUARY 17, 2025 RATING: T



TETRIS FOREVER

In honor of its 40th anniversary, Tetris is joining the Gold Master Series!

GET TOTALLY TETRISIZED, all over again!

I personally hadn't invested any time into playing Digital Eclipse's Gold Master games until recently. After my 5-year-old, Colson, fell in love with the Atari classic Crystal Castles at Long Island Retro Gaming Expo, I thought it'd be nice if he could play it at home on the Switch – then I remembered that it was included on Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration, which I'd purchased a copy of but hadn't played yet. So I finally ripped off the shrink-wrap, handed him the controller and we had a fun afternoon of running good old Bentley Bear around the screen. Just a Dad and his kid enjoying a game that first came out about 36 years before he was born. Good times had by all!

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ECLIPSE RELEASE: NOVEMBER 12, 2024 RATING: E

Introducing the great, trailblazing games of yesteryear to a new generation of players is one of the driving forces behind Digital Eclipse's recent efforts – as well as preserving and providing the full context surrounding those games' releases. Atari 50, The Making of Karateka and Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story have all been digital museums, pairing up faithful emulations of decades-old games with archival artwork from their original eras, behind-the-scenes information about their development and insightful interviews with the people that made them. And now this quest for curated context is turning its attention to another iconic name in gaming: Tetris!

This masterpiece of a falling-block puzzler was first developed by Alexey Pajitnov in Russia over 40 years ago – and it's that 40th anniversary that has inspired this collaborative celebration.

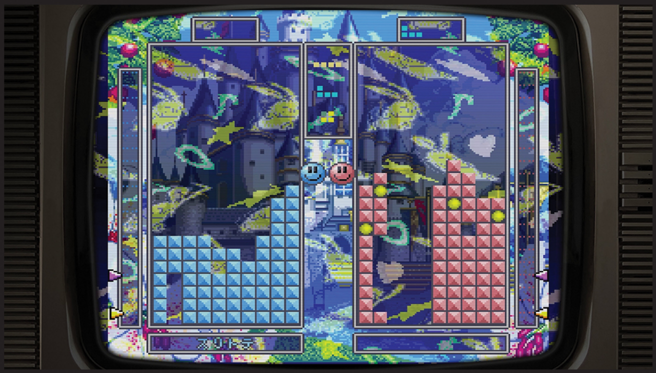
Tetris Forever will compile over 15 versions, variants and sequels to the classic game in a single collection. Kicking things off is a faithful recreation of the very first Tetris ever made – Alexey's rudimentary original version programmed for the Soviet Union's Electronika 60 computer, first sold in 1978. Then there's the Famicom version that was made and sold only in Japan – it famously has a weird and unintuitive control scheme. (You used the D-Pad to rotate the pieces, and the A Button triggered hard drops!)

Other previously Japan-only games making the trip to the West for the first time include Super Bombliss, Super Tetris 2 + Bombliss and Super Tetris 3. We've had lots of Tetris titles in the States over the years, but not all of them made it to our shores before, so Tetris Forever is going to be filling in a lot of those gaps in order to tell the brand's entire story.

Over 90 minutes of documentary footage has been shot and edited to be the primary storyteller in this package, of course – both Alexey Pajitnov and Henk Rogers sat down to fully participate. It'll be nice to hear their direct point of view in the wake of Apple's Tetris movie, which embellished a lot of the same early events that they'll surely be discussing here.

Finally, as the cherry on top and mirroring what they've done with past Gold Master games, Digital Eclipse has created something entirely new! Tetris Time Warp is a brand-new take that lets up to four players compete on the same screen, and every player's well of blocks will jump through time to different eras of Tetris history, changing looks each time it does so.

I may have let my copy of Atari 50 collect dust for months, but Tetris Forever is getting its shrink-wrap torn off on Day 1! **– LUCAS**



DRAGON QUEST III HD-2D REMAKE

A legendary RPG gets a gorgeous all-new glow-up!

WAITING IS HARD.

It's been well over three years since Dragon Quest III HD-2D Remake was officially announced and first shown, and for a while there, it looked like the game may have never gotten released! As it turns out, they just unveiled it a little too early and were hard at work making it bigger and better than ever. It's fitting that Square Enix took their time with this one, though, as DQIII is legendary – a standard-setter for RPGs and a cultural touchstone in Japan!

To the uninitiated, it may be a little difficult to understand what all the fuss is about. After all, this is a remake of an 8-bit RPG originally released way back in 1988. It came out two months after Final Fantasy *1!* Will a splash of fresh paint be enough to warrant full price for such an ancient experience?

It's a valid question, but take it from someone who first played DQIII shortly before the Switch released: This game is something special. The original team at Enix really got their sea legs after the first two DQs, and as a result just about everything clicks here. From the overworld to the pacing, the dungeon design, the variety, the soundtrack and the storytelling, it's an industry-defining JRPG.

The prologue centers on the great hero Ortega, a warrior who went missing some years ago after setting off to slay the Archfiend Baramos. He never returned, so it's now up to you, Ortega's only child, to take up the quest yourself on your 16th birthday.

While the overarching plot lacks the dynamism of something like the later Final Fantasy games, DQ stories benefit greatly from smaller, town-centric "episodes," and DQIII is no exception. A village may be under a sleeping curse, or a troubled kingdom laments the theft of its crown. The series' tone, which straddles the line between charming and emotional, really hit its stride here: Some tales are endearingly batty, like a king obsessed with finding exotic black pepper, while others such as the ghost couple are rather poignant. Comedy and tragedy are expertly balanced.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RELEASE: NOVEMBER 14, 2024 RATING: E

But don't go thinking that the main plot is inconsequential! This is some of writer/director Yuji Horii's best work, and there are wonderful and forward-thinking payoffs later on that rank among the series' most memorable moments. Despite being the third in the series, DQIII acts as a prequel, and as such it works great as an introduction to Dragon Quest. That said, people familiar with the earlier games will enjoy certain parallels and world-building elements here.

But unlike in the first game of the series, you won't be going it alone! From the get-go, you name your Hero and can immediately nab three comrades for the journey. With nine classes to choose from, there's a lot of player choice and replay value depending on your style. For example, do you fill your team with Gadabouts and deal with a much harder beginning in order to earn big payoffs later?

The compelling story and gameplay show why DQIII is legendary in its own right, but the remake is adding plenty of new features for veterans and newcomers alike to enjoy.

Obviously, the updated visuals are the first thing you'll notice. No longer consisting of chunky 8-bit sprites (or slightly less-chunky 16-bit ones), this new version features high-quality 2D images atop lush 3D backgrounds. And those backgrounds are brand-new: The world has been rebuilt from scratch, as well as expanded in scope considerably to enhance that "epic quest" feeling. Towns likewise have been made more distinctive, with unique visual elements replacing the tried-and-true tilesets of yesteryear.

The iconic characters look great, but the fully animated monsters in battle are particularly striking, with Akira Toriyama's creature designs springing to life as foes scratch, flutter and recoil. The classical-inspired soundtrack by Koichi Sugiyama – already one of the best in the series – gets the full orchestrated treatment to make the music feel as modern as the art. It's often a pet peeve of mine when games get a graphics overhaul but not an audial one (such as in many of the Zelda remakes), so it's great to see both get the boost they deserve.

Outside of the audiovisual improvements, the gameplay has been adjusted to feel familiar to fans of the more recent DQ games. Similar to DQXI, characters will get maxed-out HP and MP upon leveling up (an element that I'm a little mixed on since I enjoy the resource-management aspect of DQ dungeon crawling). But on the plus side for vets like myself, you can now crank the difficulty higher in the form of the Draconian Quest mode! Likewise, the new Dracky Quest setting is available for players looking for an easier time on their adventure. Other smaller but welcome additions include options for adjusting the battle animation speed and the language of voiced lines.

The Monster Wrangler class, which originally debuted in the Japan-only Dragon Quest X, is new to DQIII and adds an extra wrinkle to party management. They specialize in learning monster abilities (such as room-clearing breath attacks) and bring with them another new gameplay element: the Monster Arena!

Reminiscent of the fun sidequest from DQVIII, you can find and recruit certain semi-friendly critters across the world, then enlist them in tournaments to prove their worth against other baddies! If they prevail in battle, unique prizes are sure to come your way – so keep an eye out for the brawniest beasties to best the rest.

So that's the Monster Wrangler in a nutshell. It was already agonizing just choosing three classes to go with our Hero, and now we've got yet another to consider! But to help with your decision paralysis, we're featuring a rundown of every class in the game on the next two pages. And remember, you can (and should) reclass later in the game – which lets you carry over abilities – so you aren't really bound to any particular decision.

Regardless of who ultimately is traveling alongside you, you're sure to have a great time with Dragon Quest III HD-2D Remake. The new production values and gameplay features bring an already spectacular RPG into the modern era and will give players of all skill levels something to enjoy.

Square Enix kept us in suspense for a while, and the waiting has indeed been hard – but you can pass the remaining time by turning the page and planning your party composition! Happy questing! **– MATTHEW T.**

PRIMARY PROTAGONIST
HERO

Our journey through DQIII's various vocations begins here, with the one class you're stuck with for the whole game. The good news is that Ortega's mighty child can do it all! Heroes boast solid stats and solid skills across the board, which allow them to fill in whatever role necessary based on the rest of the party. Is your group full of squishy Mages and Priests? The Hero will likely be the physical fighter then. But in a lineup with three beefy Warriors, the Hero will instead be on spell duty to keep everyone healthy!

As with every class, you can choose your gender – but that's just an aesthetic choice since the skills and stats remain consistent either way. Even the personality types that once affected your level-up boosts now apply to either gender! You can also name all of your characters, but the official names for the Heroes are Arus (the boy) and Aileen (the girl).

FIERCE FIGHTER
WARRIOR

There's a time and place for subtlety, but sometimes you just want to slam those baddies into the ground so you can get back to map traversal!

Tough, tanky and titanic, the classic Warrior will get the job done in as few steps as possible. They can take damage as well as they dish it out, thanks to having access to the game's heaviest equipment. Just don't expect them to lead the charge, since they tend to attack after faster heroes and monsters have already taken their turns. (Read: They're slow.)

Blade-wielding brutes may not be your speed, but even tacticians who usually avoid the blunt approach may want to give Warriors a shot this time. While they used to possess few options in battle, this remake grants them a slew of special MP-charged skills! But Warrior veterans, don't fret – I'm sure it just means they'll be kicking butt even harder than before.

THROWING HANDS
MARTIAL ARTIST

Drackies beware! Looking like they've stepped straight out of Dragon Ball Z, the popular Martial Artists can be serious mob-slayers in DQ games. While they share an offense-focused appeal similar to the Warrior, this agile class trades in heavy defense for high speed. They'll often take the lead in combat, tenderizing Raven Lunatics and Rottenweilers before they even have a chance to know what hit 'em. But make sure you keep an eye on their HP, because these pugilists won't allow much armor to weigh them down.

Martial Artists also have an ace up their sleeve – a deliciously high critical hit rate. There's nothing quite like witnessing a defense-shattering karate chop make short work of a Metal Slime! Just keep in mind that Martial Artists lack magic, so your options may be limited in an emergency defensive situation. Even so, this class is a kick!

MASTER SPELLCASTER
MAGE

The Mage really needs no introduction, as it's a concept older than the RPG itself. Nevertheless, it's a smart idea to bring one of these spellcasters along. They'll regularly be dealing the highest amounts of damage in your whole party, provided you keep their MP reserves from expiring. Frizz spells work great on single targets, while Sizz smokes grouped-together foes and Bang/Boom blasts the whole lot of 'em! But their best spell may actually be the Oomph buff, which raises other party members' attack to astronomical levels.

Just don't get too complacent, because these glass cannons have slim pickings when it comes to equipment – and their physical attack is as abysmal as their defense, so they do require a bit of babysitting. Nevertheless, whether dealing with small hordes or mighty bosses, the dynamic Mage is invaluable in battle! . . . MP permitting, of course.

KEEPING YOU HEALTHY
PRIEST

As much as we like to think our merry band can take on anything, Dragon Quest is often a game of resource management. And few things sting more than getting party-wiped mid-dungeon and awakening in a distant town with half your gold gone. It's at those points that you'll wish you'd brought a Priest along!

These holy heroes specialize in healing wounds, removing poison and, later, even raising the dead (if you're lucky, that is)! But unlike their Final Fantasy cousin, the White Mage, Priests often have some pretty decent offensive capabilities when they aren't restoring HP. Don't underestimate their basic attack, nor the occasional spell (like the Woosh line) that can target groups. And you'll do well to embrace buffs and debuffs – they can make or break boss battles. Just make sure your Priests throw those out early when it looks like it'll be a long fight!

CURRENCY COLLECTOR
MERCHANT

Do you like money? With an eye for picking up extra gold after battle, the enterprising Merchant is sure to help you bring in the big bucks. And whenever you need the rundown on any of your items or equipment, these two have a talent for appraisal. They can even earn a couple of quirky skills such as summoning other shopkeepers on the field for spur-of-the-moment selling!

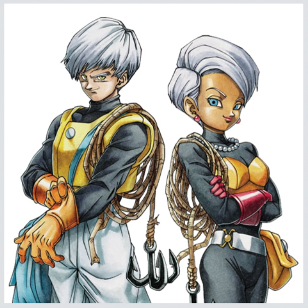
All of this utility comes at a price, though: Merchants are rather middling when it comes to combat, with average stats across the board and little in the way of special abilities (at least in previous releases). There is one unique point in the game where a Merchant is required to undertake a specific quest, and their personalities really come through during this section. While they're not the toughest fighters, you'll enjoy overflowing coffers if you can overcome their shortcomings!

PARTY TIME!
GADABOUT

Look, aren't we all just taking things a little too seriously? Why focus on balance when we can have some laughs?

The Gadabout was originally known as the Goof-Off on the NES, and that's precisely what you get with these goobers. Remember in EarthBound, when your enemies would waste turns by falling over or laughing hysterically? Now you can experience that yourself with a couple of jokers who sometimes just ignore your commands and instead do all sorts of wacky, mostly useless antics. Good thing their stats are . . . uh, mediocre to bad?

So what's the point? Well, Gadabouts must hold powerful potential deep within their loopy heads, because this is the only class that can reclass into the formidable Sage. Sometimes good things come to those who suffer through tomfoolery, and your patience will pay off once your jester suddenly decides to take things seriously.



PICKING POCKETS
THIEF

And now it's time for the best class of all!

. . . OK, *maybe* I'm a little biased toward Thieves. I just can't resist the mechanic of getting extra goodies from foes, especially if they're particularly rare or valuable. These sticky-fingered scrappers actually were a bonus addition in the Super Famicom and Game Boy Color ports of the game, so it's nice to see that they stuck around.

Thieves are naturally quick, and their tepid offense is made up for by the fact that they can wield group-hitting weaponry such as whips and boomerangs. This allows you to make quick work of enemy mobs and get back to treasure hunting! On that note, they can also learn a handful of quirky Skills that can sniff out loot.

So if you can deal with characters who aren't great against bosses, you'll enjoy a bounty of valuables with a Thief aboard!

DEAR OLD DAD
ORTEGA

While we've covered the "Hero" class already, the real hero at the start of Dragon Quest III is this absolutely massive warrior, Ortega. Years prior, Ortega bid his wife and child farewell and traveled the world in order to bring the Archfiend Baramos to justice. He hasn't been heard from since, so it's up to his offspring (and three worthy recruits!) to take the mantle in his stead.

Ortega has always been a fairly mysterious character, and the original Super Famicom remake gave us a little more of a peek at the man behind the mythos. But now he really gets to shine, with brand-new episodes giving us a good look at what Dad has been up to all this time! These side chapters have been crafted just for this HD-2D Remake, and they're sure to add further richness to the world and story. I personally can't wait to see this champion in action again!

ELEVATED VOCATION
SAGE

OK, all biases aside, this really is the best selectable class in the game. Sages are just plain awesome, combining the Priest's incredible healing/buffing capabilities with the Mage's explosive spellcasting. And the rest of their stats are no slouch either, thanks to being able to don some of the game's strongest equipment. It honestly wouldn't be a bad idea to have three of these paladins alongside your Hero.

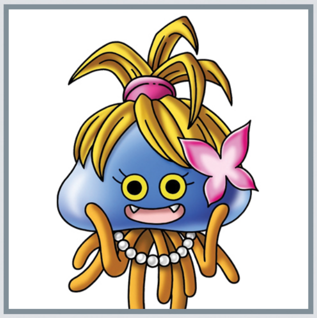
There's got to be a catch, right? Indeed there is: Sages are not selectable through normal means. You can't start as a Sage, and can only reclass into one by meeting one of two conditions. First, you could train one of those goofy Gadabouts until he or she reaches a high enough level. Or if you don't feel like clowning around, there is a rare, limited item that allows other party members to become a Sage. Either way, try to get at least one!

NEW!

THE WAY OF THE BEAST
MONSTER WRANGLER

While Thieves were featured as an additional class in earlier DQIII remakes, Monster Wranglers are new to this game and ready to prove their worth! As such, it's tough to make definitive early claims on their stats and abilities, but if their DQX appearance is anything to go by, we can take some educated guesses. They'll likely boast high strength and HP, though their agility and MP will pale in comparison.

Sounds like a Warrior by a different name? Not quite – these barbarians are a little more in tune with nature than their ironclad brethren, and as such they have access to monster abilities such as Flame Breath and even some light, multi-target healing. That versatility should make this feral fighter a real beast in battle, so feel free to go wild and add one to your team!



CUTE COSMETOLOGIST
HEALIZAH

This page is positively plastered with classic character designs, although picky players may bristle at the drastic changes that go with reclassing. Look at that old Mage, for instance! How could he possibly look like the stalwart Warrior after a simple change of clothes? Well, somewhere along the line the developers agreed, and now we have the flexibility to adjust the characters' designs beyond the defaults you see here! Per class, you can choose from four different looks for the gentlemen and four more for the ladies. What's even better is the shared consistency across the classes, so you can have old bearded dudes regardless of vocation!

Healizah here is a stylish Healslime who's willing to lend a tentacle if you change your mind. She won't join your party, but she does let you alter your characters' looks, as well as their voices. A makeover is just a moment away!

Mario & Luigi ? in Super Snorio Bros.

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

ALPHADREAM'S RPG BEFORE MARIO & LUIGI

TOMATO ADVENTURE
GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2002

If the unexpected resurrection of the Mario & Luigi RPG series has inspired you to go back and play any of its earlier entries, might I suggest turning back the clock one step further? All true Mario & Luigi fans owe it to themselves to play Tomato Adventure, the game AlphaDream made just before Superstar Saga and the real origin point of many of the gameplay concepts the Mario Bros. encountered in their quest — particularly the timing-dependent, minigame-like attack techniques! Tomato Adventure was only ever officially released in Japan, but there is an excellent fan translation that thousands have already enjoyed. Join them! **— LUCAS**

TRAPPED IN THE PAST
JACK BROS.

This spin-off of the Shin Megami Tensei series may never be seen again.

YOU MIGHT THINK you know Jack. But do you know *these* Jacks?

Nintendo's most famous flop of a video game system, the Virtual Boy, wasn't on the market long enough to see the release of many games. In fact, in North America, only a total of *14* different titles ever officially made it to market! And yet, even among that complete system library of barely over a dozen distinct products, there still appeared this one truly odd and historically significant spin-off.

Jack Bros. was the first Shin Megami Tensei title to ever see release in the States! Shin Megami Tensei is, of course, a juggernaut of a role-playing franchise all around the globe these days, having since found full acceptance in the West and risen to ever grander heights since another of its spin-offs, Persona, has become its own super-popular sub-series. It even got a cast member into the latest installment of Super Smash Bros.: Joker, from Persona 5!

For as notable as Joker and his team of friends, the Phantom Thieves, have become, though, they must owe a debt of gratitude to this tiny trio of fairy demons for being the ones to first blaze the trail for later localizations of the main SMT and Persona RPGs. Even though Jack Bros., design-wise, is about as far removed from a role-playing game as you could possibly get!

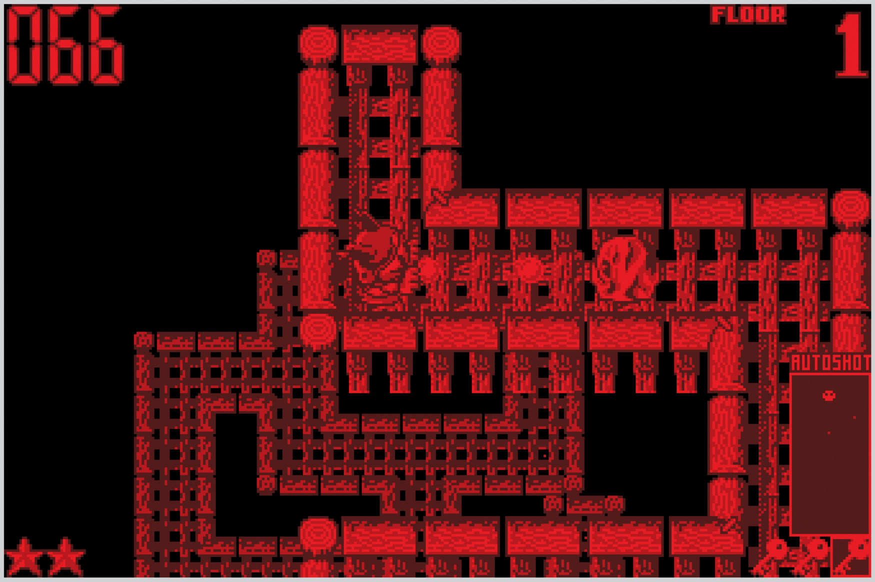
This adventure is a twin-stick shooter. (Or, as others have said, a "twin D-Pad" shooter since the Virtual Boy's controller had no analog sticks.) It's an action game in which players must guide one of the three Jack Brothers through cramped corridors laid out like a labyrinth, firing projectiles at any enemies who appear to oppose their progress.

The story asserts that the brothers are in a time-crunched trouble of their own making: On Halloween morning they decided to venture into the realm of humans to make mischief . . . but since they were having so much fun, they lost track of time! The clock strikes 11:00 p.m. and the siblings are suddenly frantic to make their way home to the World of the Fairies — because if they don't get back before the stroke of midnight, they'll be trapped in the human world forever!

That narrative setup explains the countdown timer that appears during gameplay, constantly adding more and more tension to the adventure as precious seconds tick away. What's worse, taking damage from enemies doesn't make the Jacks lose HP — instead, they lose time off the clock! (Yikes!)

Practiced players who take full advantage of each character's special abilites could see the quest through to its conclusion, though. Jack Frost, the sentient snowman, could rapidly hurl snowballs and freeze his foes in place. Jack Lantern, the pumpkin-headed hero, had fire-themed attacks instead — he's sometimes been named "Pyro Jack" in later SMT series cameos. Finally, there was Jack Skelton. He had no power to project projectiles at all, but his melee-ranged knife expertly carved up any enemy who got too close!

Jack Bros. was a genuinely good game, and it's a shame that the failure of the Virtual Boy itself seems to have doomed it from ever being made available again. *Maybe* Nintendo will officially emulate VB games in the future, or *maybe* Atlus will remake this one sometime? Neither seem too likely, but either would be welcomed with open arms! **— LUCAS**



ORIGINAL RELEASE:
VIRTUAL BOY, OCTOBER 1995
PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: ATLUS

THE JACKS LIVE ON

While Jack Bros. the game may be lost to time, the Jack Brothers characters have at least gone on to reappear several times in their home series of Shin Megami Tensei. Jack Frost is the best-known of the trio, as he's served as the mascot character for Atlus as a whole for decades! Jack Skelton (or "Jack Ripper" in Japan) is the least seen, and Jack Lantern falls between the two. You've probably run into him in an SMT RPG!

ORIGINAL RELEASE:
SUPER FAMICOM, SEPTEMBER 22, 1995
PUBLISHER: NCS DEVELOPERS:
MASAYA & BITS LABORATORY

PLAYING IT TODAY

Like many fighting games, there isn't a whole lot of text you need to worry about, and a lot of it is already in English. A Western release on modern platforms isn't out of the question either, as Edia is soon releasing a collection of the PC-Engine games, so a port of Bakuretsu Ranto Hen could conceivably follow.

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION

CHO ANIKI: BAKURETSU RANTO HEN

Brawling brothers with beefy, buff bods? Brilliant!

READY TO LEARN a new word? "Bakage" is a Japanese portmanteau of "baka," meaning stupid, and "gemu," a loanword meaning game. Together, it means "stupid game," but usually, it's applied to a game that is outlandishly weird. Katamari Damacy is a pretty well-known example of bakage. However, few are stranger than the Cho Aniki series.

Translating to "Super Big Brother," it's hard to say what the Cho Aniki series is really about, but I'd say it's about the human body. More specifically, muscles: peak condition enabled only by a protein-dominated diet . . . *and* possibly performance-enhancing substances.

The first game was released on the PC-Engine Super CD-ROM² system in 1992, and involves a muscle-bound warlord invading neighboring star systems in an effort to secure the protein resources required to sustain his intense flexing. It was followed in 1995 by Ai Cho Aniki (Love Super Big Brother), which involved the brothers Adon and Samson attempting to rescue one of the protagonists of a previous game.

But while those two games were scrolling shoot-'em-ups (if you can believe it), 1995's Cho Aniki: Bakuretsu Ranto Hen (Super Big Brother: Exploding Brawl) on Super Famicom is a 1v1 fighting game. Though to differentiate it from the crowded arcade fighter crowd, all of its characters fly, moving through strange dreamscapes that depict things like muscle-bound trains hauling vegetables or transparent dudes doing endless squats. (If there's an explanation for the universe these muscle mountains exist in, I would love to hear it.)

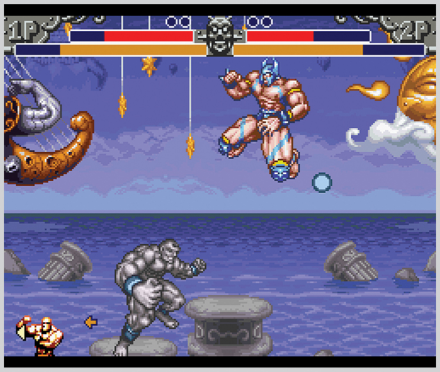
There are eight characters to choose from, most of whom are torn from the previous games. This allows you to play as bosses like Adam, a man who resembles a figure from Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam" fresco but riding in a bathtub shaped like the moon for some reason. You can flex your muscles as protagonists like the previously mentioned Adon. Perhaps climb aboard Mami-19, a woman fused with a boat that has miniature bodybuilders riding on its deck. Or maybe just follow your ambitions for protein-powered conquest as mainstay antagonist Botei Bill.

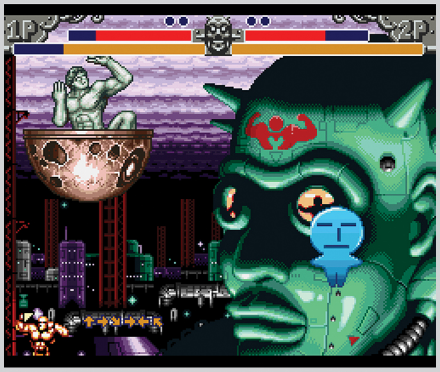
Unfortunately, while distinctive in their aesthetic, the Cho Aniki games have never really been celebrated for their quality, and Bakuretsu Ranto Hen is no exception. This largely comes down to the hit detection being junk: In any given match, there will likely be many instances where you will swear that an attack went directly through your opponent without them feeling it.

A two-player match can easily devolve into both contestants dashing around the arena, trying to land whatever attack they can. Meanwhile, CPU-controlled opponents clearly don't know how to cope with their range of motion. My favorite technique was to squish them at the bottom of the screen, repeatedly unleashing downward attacks until they manage to slide out to freedom. (If they get out at all.) They generally don't do well against angled attacks, but gosh, they know how to put up their guard when you'd rather they didn't.

It's not an irredeemably terrible game, but you would certainly think so if you asked me while I was screaming at my TV screen. Getting my beef-bod kicked apart by the strangely out-of-place Uminin for the jillionth time can do that to you. Your opponent is picked at random at the start of each new match, regardless of whether you won or lost the last one. You also can't change characters mid-game. This is contrary to, say, Street Fighter II, where you'd just grind the same foe until you can overcome them. This leads to a bizarrely uneven difficulty curve. Technically, the enemy's power level goes up the more you defeat, but somehow, Uminin bends that curve over its non-existent knee.

Personality counts for a lot, and Bakuretsu Ranto Hen is absolutely bulging with it. It might not become a staple in your regular fighting game rotation, but if you want to shock your friends with washboard six-packs and don't have one of your own, it might be worth breaking out. One might say that showing it off would be a real flex! **— ZOEY**





WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

THEY'RE FINALLY HERE, performing for you!

The DK Crew took the cover of NP #126 (though Donkey Kong swung solo on the newsstand version). Nine pages of banana-slammin' action were joined by Rocket: Robot on Wheels, Harvest Moon 64, Jet Force Gemini (on the poster with NBA Courtside 2), Resident Evil 2, Earthworm Jim 3D, Monopoly and BattleTanx: Global Assault, all for N64.

Those looking to get their fix of Portable Power had Survival Kids and the legendary GBC version of Mario Golf, as NP debuted a new recurring feature to help cover all the new titles that were arriving in the wake of the color handheld's release. "Game Boy A-Go-Go" gave Power Players peeks at Disney's Beauty and the Beast: A Board Game Adventure, Catwoman, Towers: Lord Baniff's Deceit, Earthworm Jim: Menace 2 The Galaxy, All Star Tennis '99, Rampage 2: Universal Tour, Puzzle Master and Ms. Pac-Man: Special Color Edition.

If you're worried that NP had forgotten about Pikachu and his pals, there was no need to fear: The new Pokécenter was here! Pokémania ran wild over the course of 29 pages with a Pokémon Snap contest, Pokéchat, Ask the Professor, Colosseum, fan art, Pokémon Gold, Silver and Stadium at Spaceworld, eight pages of the Mewtwo Strikes Back movie and Pikachu's Vacation (including some behind-the-scenes), and 16 pages of screencap comics from the anime episode "Bulbasaur and the Hidden Village."

This month's Player's Poll winners got their very own Monopoly-inspired sack of money: $5,000 worth! (And Monopoly for the N64.) Runners-up also got the N64 game, but had to settle for Monopoly: Millennium Edition instead of the big sack with the dollar sign on it.

Pak Watch closed the issue out with the reveal of the Donkey Kong 64 Jungle Green Nintendo 64 set, Namco Classic Museum and more.

Have a nice day . . . BANG-BANG! Mankind, a.k.a. Mick Foley, alongside his trusty sidekick Socko, claimed the cover of the December 1999 issue to promote the game based on that Spring's upcoming pay-per-view event, WWF WrestleMania 2000. Joining the pair for some slammin' N64 action were Toy Story 2, Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness, Part 2 of Donkey Kong 64 (sharing the poster with Buzz Lightyear), Ready 2 Rumble Boxing, Top Gear Rally 2 and Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six.

Game Boy Color coverage featured Mickey's Racing Adventure, Star Wars Episode I: Racer and Ghosts 'n Goblins. Game Boy A-Go-Go highlighted NBA 3-on-3 Featuring Kobe Bryant, Army Men, Vegas Games, The Mask of Zorro, Game & Watch Gallery 3, Top Gear Pocket 2 and Rampart.

Which b-ball game was the right one for you to take to the hole? That's what the N-Sports NBA N64 Tip-Off feature was here to help you decide, with cross-examinations of NBA Live 2000, NBA Jam 2000, NBA In the Zone and NBA Showtime.

This issue's Pokécenter wasn't as massive as before, but did feature a preview of Pokémon Stadium, a look at the Pokémon toys that were coming to Burger King's Kids Meals (and the cool gold cards), a Mew giveaway and a comic adaptation of "Charmander, the Stray Pokémon."

Closing things out in Pak Watch, Nintendo showed off their GBC sequel to Capcom classic Bionic Commando, John Romero's %!&?#-making Daikatana, Blaster Master for GBC, Mario Party 2 and more.

Finally, the Poll winner for this month got a pair of tickets to see WWF WrestleMania 2000 in LA, along with a copy of the game. The second-place jabronis had to settle for a WrestleMania: The Legacy VHS (ask your parents) box set, as well as the game. *And that's the bottom line!* — **DAVID**

NINTENDO 64

DONKEY KONG 64

Everyone will go bananas over DK 64. It's HUGE!

GRAPHICS: Donkey Kong 64 gets the most out of the N64 using the Expansion Pak to deliver stunning real-time lighting effects. Every graphic detail, from the animation to the textures, is a Rare and precious gift.
PLAY CONTROL: Although each Kong has several individual moves, it's easy to learn and use most of them. The camera can be slightly frustrating when it doesn't follow the character quite fast enough.
GAME DESIGN: DK 64 is vast, but it seems even more so, because you have to cover each world five times, and during each exploration with a new Kong you'll open up new areas. The variety of play is staggering.
SATISFACTION: Players of all kinds will love DK, but it will take most of them a long time to finish the game. Even the best players will spend dozens of hours in the eight worlds.
SOUND: The music is always appropriate, and the quality is exceptional. The sound effects are often comical.
COMMENTS: Scott—*It's easy to get side-tracked, but that just adds to the challenge. Overall, it's magnificent.* Nate—*All in all, it's a huge and hugely satisfying game.* Andy—*Rare knows how to create a rich gaming experience.* Kyle—*Too darn many little bits to keep track of.*

- Nintendo/256 Megabits
- One to four players simultaneously
- Expansion Pak included with the game
- 8 worlds
- 2 multiplayer games with six modes

OVERALL 8.6 RATING

GRAPHICS 9.6
PLAY CONTROL 8.0
GAME DESIGN 8.1
SAT. 8.6
SOUND 9.0

HOW IT RATES
DK 64 gets the expected E rating from the ESRB, but the ratings board also included a comment about animated violence. This is the sort of comic cartoon violence that you get in most platform games.

NINTENDO POWER STAFF SCORES
9.8 → Andy
9.7 → John
9.3 → Kyle
8.6 → Scott
7.3 → Armond

ISSUE #126: NOVEMBER 1999

ISSUE #127: DECEMBER 1999

TOM VIAN
Born May 25, 1985; Loves Spaghetti Bolognese

ADAM VIAN
Born March 21, 1988; Loves Anchovy Pizza

THE VIAN BROTHERS

As the Switch era draws to an end, we catch up with the sibling superstars who helped to launch the system!

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NF: What inspired you to first get into game development, and what was your first project?
ADAM: We grew up playing games on the Mega Drive and the ZX Spectrum, but I don't remember thinking about game development as a thing you could do until I came upon the Net Yaroze games on the PlayStation demo discs. Even then, it didn't seem like something we could ever do ourselves . . . not until we got hold of Macromedia Flash, years later. Tom and I first taught ourselves to use Flash to make animations and websites – the fact you could make games with it was an unexpected bonus.
TOM: Learning to code in Flash was initially just to make shinier web pages, but when we watched our favorite Flash animations on sites like Newgrounds, we saw that others were using it to make games, so we thought it would be fun to give it a go! I had this huge RPG planned out, using lots of Nintendo characters, of course. (Copyright? What's that?) We started development by making a much simpler arcade-y game designed to be played while the main game loaded. As it dawned on us that perhaps an 80-hour RPG was a little out of scope, we decided to release the smaller game by itself on Newgrounds, and that was our very first title: Kirby's Star Scramble. It led to a sequel of sorts, and then more small games, each slightly more intricate than the last. It was only about halfway through our Flash game days that we started getting paid anything – it was just about having fun and challenging ourselves to make things.

How has your partnership changed, and how has it stayed the same, since those early years on Newgrounds?
ADAM: Personally, I don't think it's changed much at all! Tom and I have always found ourselves creatively aligned – we think it's because we played all the same games and watched all the same cartoons as kids; so we developed very similar tastes. For the most part, we still fill the same two roles that we always did: Tom as the programmer and myself as the artist. Although we've both gained new skills and now wear a lot of additional hats. For example, Tom has developed a lot of broader tech and bizdev skills, and I'm often working as a writer and creative director – so I guide the work of any artists, animators, voice actors and musicians who join our team.
TOM: The one big change has been the size of the games we make. It used to take us two days to make and release a game – now we're unlikely to take less than two years. That size change has brought with it the need to hire other people to work with us, so it's rarely just Adam and me in a room making something alone any more.

Many people know you two as the creators of Snipperclips, a Nintendo-published Switch launch title that did a lot to communicate that the new console would hold tight to the company's signature sense of whimsy. How did it feel to be a part of that launch?
TOM: We were very lucky to have stumbled onto a game idea that fit the Switch so well, before anyone even knew what the Switch was. To go from a small prototype (made in Flash, I might add) to working directly with Nintendo for nearly two years, it was a huge step up in almost every aspect of gamedev – they taught us a lot along the way, and it was easy to see from the inside why the games they make and publish come out so polished!
ADAM: It was wild. We were basically nobodies, but Nintendo liked the game so much that they trusted us with making it a launch title for their new console. Visiting Nintendo's offices to be informed about the top-secret new hardware was easily one of the most exciting moments in my career. It gave me a really strong sense of purpose, and a feeling of responsibility. I knew I had to do a good job – I didn't want to let Nintendo down!!

Snipperclips is all about thinking about where you overlap with the other player, and where you don't, in order to work together to solve mutual problems. Was the game inspired at all by your brotherly dynamic, or any of your other real-life relationships?
ADAM: You know, I've never thought about that parallel before – maybe it was inspired by that! Or maybe that's just what made it fun for us to play, and a therefore a good fit for us to develop. I distinctly remember the first time we ever got the game working – on Day 1 of the original prototype, Tom and I played it together and we were both laughing. That's when we knew it was something special.

Personally I'm just a fan of multiplayer games that naturally encourage you to communicate with the people you're playing with – and I don't just mean co-op games. It can be anything.

For instance, the real joy of Mario Party is found in all the moments it forges between the players sitting in the room – all the meaningful eye contact, the dirty looks, the sulking, the pleading with someone not to steal your star, etc.
TOM: I think we got a few dirty looks from the other folks in the coworking space we were in at the time, while we were loudly cracking up over silly paper people. Sorry everyone, it was worth it in the end! (For us.)

Shortly after wrapping up work on Snipperclips Plus (the director's "cut" of the original), you started work in earnest on Tangle Tower, a sequel to your character-focused murder mystery puzzle game, Detective Grimoire. And our understanding is you're now working on another installment in the franchise as we speak. How did these games get their start, and what is it about this world that keeps you coming back to it again and again?
ADAM: To put it bluntly, we started making Detective Grimoire games because we'd both played Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney on the DS, and we'd both loved it. We thought it was a genre that might be fun and acheivable to tackle as developers – since, mechanically, it's quite simple.

Whether it's Tangle Tower, or the next entry, The Mermaid Mask, the world of Detective Grimoire is just fun to play around in. Tonally, it floats somewhere between Tintin, Indiana Jones, Monkey Island and the aforementioned Ace Attorney – and it's all one big excuse to dream up fun locations and characters.
TOM: It was quite therapeutic to go back to that style of game after the physics-based chaos of a game like Snipperclips! Each click has a well-defined, predictable outcome, and no one's clipping through the floor.

Comedy is notoriously hard to pull off in games, yet you've managed to excel at both types – the scripted jokes and quips in Tangle Tower, and the unplanned, player-driven physical comedy in Snipperclips. Given that you are so close to the games you make, how do you go about testing to see if they truly are funny to watch, and/or to play, before releasing them to the public?
ADAM: It was immediately obvious that Snipperclips was funny, right back when we made the original prototype. But even as development continued and we became somewhat inured to it – every time we added a new mechanic, something would happen that would make us all laugh. I've gone looking for this particular magic in many, many prototypes since. It's tough. It can't be forced. Snipperclips was lightning in a bottle, to some extent – and if it's the best game idea we ever have, I can live with that.

As for the humor in Tangle Tower, that's a lot more traditional. Come up with a joke, tweak it, iterate it, and then come back a week later after some distance and see if it actually ever was funny. And then, the most important part: the voice acting. Edwyn Tiong (as Grimoire) and Amber Lee Connors (as Sally) will give such good line reads that I'll be laughing out loud at jokes I myself have written. That's when you know it's working!

Crow Country, your latest game, aims for the other end of the spectrum. Though there are a few laughs here and there to break the tension, for the most part, it looks and feels like the shattered memory of a forgotten PS1/Saturn/N64 survival horror game. How did you go about creating something that's as fun as the classics of those consoles, without bringing along their clunky, unwanted baggage?
ADAM: I have a real love for PS1-era stuff, and in some regards, I'd say the clunkier the better – I find something uniquely enjoyable about getting good at a game that has a lot of rough edges. And when you're dealing with survival horror, somewhat "clunky" aiming and movement just raises the tension – but I'm also aware that modern audiences expect something smoother and more polished, so Crow Country was about balancing the two sides.

As for recreating the fun of old classics, it's just a case of playing old games and identifying the broad qualities that make them fun, without getting caught on anything too specific. For example, the Spencer Mansion in Resident Evil 1 is an excellent setting, but not because it's a spooky mansion in the woods – it's excellent because of the way the progression is handled, the pace at which you find new items and enemy types, etc. And then these broad qualities are something you can transplant into, say, an abandoned theme park, without it actually feeling like you've ripped off the Spencer Mansion.
TOM: A lot of the clunk in early games is down to hardware limitations at the time. Since we're aiming for a vibe, rather than a faithful reproduction of those limitations, we can pick and

SNIP & CLIP IN GOOD COMPANY

The just-opened Nintendo Museum in Japan includes a massive wall of the company's characters in a collage . . . including Tom and Adam's creations, Snip and Clip from Snipperclips! What an incredible honor!

choose which to keep and which to quietly forget. Low-poly models and a low-resolution, pixelated style help the vibe, so they stay, but loading screens to mask long disc read times? Gone. Early PS1 games couldn't guarantee the player had an analog stick controller, so movement was designed around the D-Pad – now, on console at least, we know players will have both, so why not give them both retro movement on the D-Pad and modern on the stick?

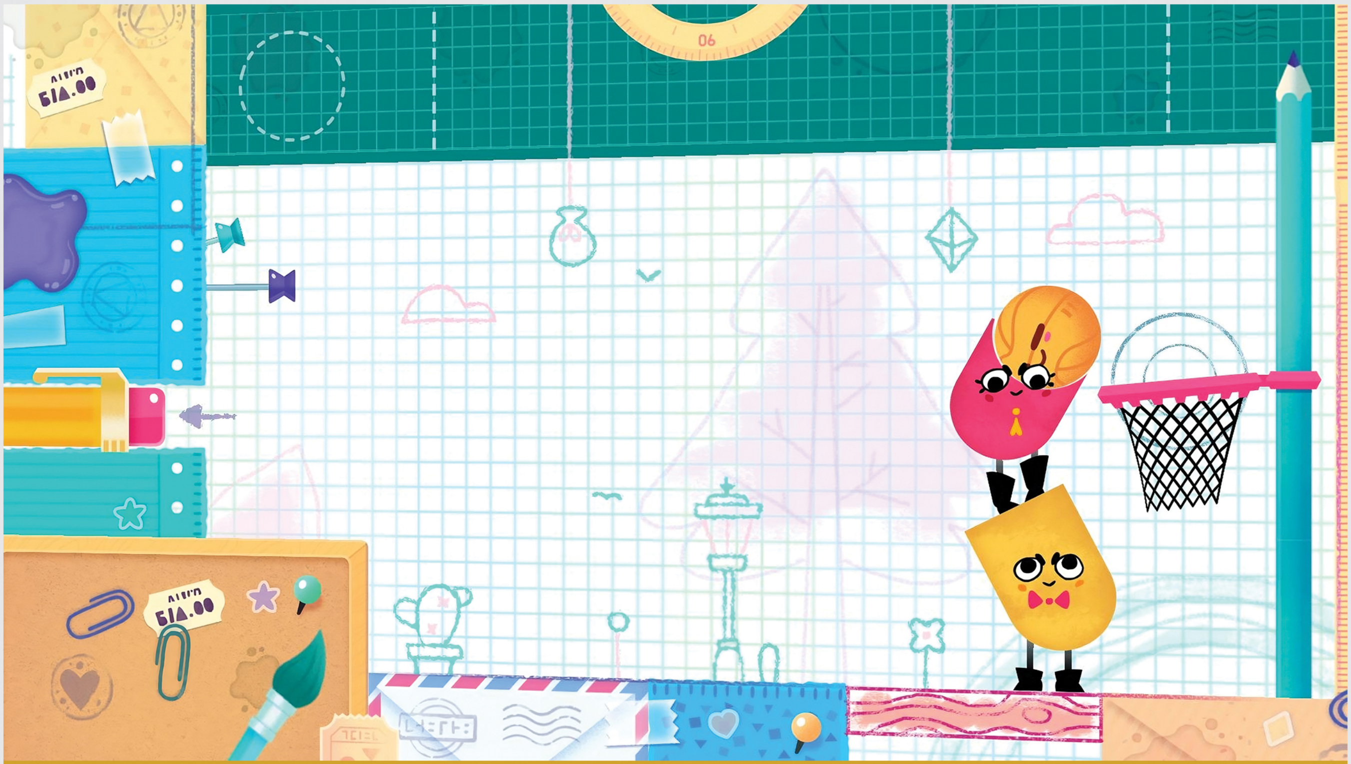
What was behind the decision to bring Crow Country to Nintendo Switch? And were there any particular hurdles you had to overcome to get it ready for release?
TOM: While Crow Country is clearly inspired by classic PlayStation games, we always felt like it would be a great fit for the Switch too. What better place to play a cozy horror game than under the bedcovers with no light but the light of the screen? We had looked into bringing it over for the initial launch back in May, but it turned out to be too big of a job – I've actually been working on it ever since then! The game worked when we first compiled it for the Switch, but the way the 3D models were built and the amount of real-time lighting meant it didn't run as smoothly as other platforms. Being our first real 3D game, it turns out there was a lot to learn about how to optimize these things properly. Lessons we'll carry into the next 3D game we make, and use from the very start!

Between Snip and Clip from Snipperclips, Detective Grimoire and the cast of Tangle Tower, and Mara Forest from Crow Country, you've built quite a diverse crowd of genre icons. Any chance we'll see them crossover someday? If so, what would be the right genre for their shared universe?
ADAM: Maybe they could be in a golf game together, after they're all retired. (We'd actually like to make a golf game one day. It's a fun genre to experiment with – Ribbit King being one of my favorite hidden gems.)
TOM: I have a few golfing mechanic ideas in my notebook, though I don't think either of us enjoy real, non-crazy golf in real life?

Other than the Stamper Brothers (Rare), the Brierly Brothers (Soda Drinker Pro) and the Allanson Brothers (YIIK), not many bros have managed to keep making games together for more than a decade. Do you have any words of advice for siblings at home who want to keep working together successfully well into adulthood?
ADAM: What about the Oliver twins of Dizzy the Egg fame?
TOM: Dizzy was formative stuff for us!
I think if you get on well enough to make a game together from start to finish without any major disagreements, then you have everything you need to carry on.

If you could work on any Nintendo franchise, with full creative control and an unlimited budget, which one would you choose and what would you make?
TOM: My favorite Nintendo universe is Splatoon. I'd love to do something in that world one day. I'm not sure we're fresh enough though . . .
ADAM: I'd love to make a game about Ashley from WarioWare. She's my fave. It could have some kind of systemic sandbox potion/spell-making mechanics, where you have to devise your own magical solutions to various problems, and sometimes it goes wrong, which would generate viral video clips with titles like "What happens when you put 6,000 spirit radishes in an expired love potion" or whatever.

If you could have any superpower, which would you choose and why?
ADAM: Sincere answer: invisibility, so I could freely wander around all kinds of forbidden and abandoned places without fear of getting in trouble.
TOM: One-minute time rewinding! Enough to undo serious blunders or minor mishaps, but without the temptation to go back further and change anything bigger. NF



IT'S NOT EVERY DAY THAT NINTENDO INVITES AN INDIE DEVELOPER DUO TO DEBUT THEIR WORK AS A DAY 1 LAUNCH TITLE! THE VIAN BROTHERS EARNED THAT HONOR, AND GOT TO PRESENT SNIPPERCLIPS TO THE WORLD ON MARCH 3, 2017.

BY JONATHAN HOLMES & GRAYSON EVANS

REVIEWS

The TMNT franchise's newest team of Turtle teens are making their video game debut! How does their first step into the medium stack up against the classics headlined by their big brothers from past iterations? Find out with our full review!

A New Brand of the Same Brothers

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MUTANTS UNLEASHED

EVERYBODY HAS THEIR favorite Ninja Turtle, so this game may be problematic for TMNT fans right up front: It doesn't let you choose who to use! I couldn't pick my preferred character until the eighth level! That bold break from Turtles tradition tells you right away that this new dev team was going for something different. But was that wise, or just a bad idea?

The first thing everyone will notice (that I dearly hope will be addressed in a patch) is this game's *crazily* long load times. Sometimes you'll be sitting for multiple minutes waiting for a cutscene to load – just to jump back into *another* loading screen to load the level. Between launching into a new game and being able to control a character, I clocked seven minutes and 32 seconds, which is just egregious. Granted, you get a title screen and several cutscenes before that, but they all need to – you guessed it – LOAD!

"Levels" are short. In fact, there's only one enemy in the first stage – it's mostly learning how to move in the 3D space and destroy boxes. You *must* play as Leo as well, which is very odd in a TMNT title. In the next level you have to control Raph. Odder still is playing two-player – because it won't keep characters consistent even then! To use the first level as an example again: Player 1 will control Leo while Raph is Player 2. But once the second level loads, Player 1 will be Raph, and Player 2 will swap over to Leo. Huh?

What an odd and confusing design choice. And when the camera only follows Player 1, it leads to even more problems: You next hit the streets as Donnie, and Mikey leads the fourth level. But there's never any narrative reason why certain Turtles have to be the ones under player control – the cutscenes carry on acting like all four are traveling together anyway. It's just a baffling call for a TMNT game.

The game picks up directly after the latest movie, TMNT: Mutant Mayhem, and does a fantastic job of mimicking the manic colored-pencil stylizing that brought that movie to life. (If you haven't seen the flick, the brothers' new personalities, voices and looks might be a surprise to you.) The animation during the cutscenes is good, and the developers got the same actors from the movie and the new Paramount+ animated series to voice the bros. The music also fits this new universe (and provides the only respite from waiting during loading).

Once you're done battling some "Mewbies" – the term Mikey coins for the new mutants in New York – the battling slows down in favor of more story progression. Leo, for example, goes to meet a new character named Toby at a center for human and mutant relations, and doing so raises the friendship level between Toby and Leo, and also unlocks moves in Leo's skill tree. There isn't much interaction here. Players can skip the dialogue to get the prize, and that's about it.

Each turtle has these missions, and players must choose which Turtle will visit which person in the days between major story events. (So player choice does become a thing at this point.)

There is a day/night cycle, and the entire story happens in the span of a couple of months, so there's plenty to do. Being able to walk around the lair, interact with Splinter and perform other tasks is neat, but there's also a fast-travel map that can bypass all of that. These bare-bones RPG elements are OK, but when paired with the daunting load times and awkward, often lengthy conversations, I'd rather just skip to the battling. (Though there is an in-game smartphone app called "Digimutant" that sends you on scavenger hunts for mutants, and that was actually pretty fun.)

Battle levels consist of plenty of light platforming, which can turn frustrating due to the fixed camera. Despite the levels looking fully explorable, players are forced into a linear path by invisible walls. When collectables like VHS tapes for XP, ooze canisters that boost stats and more are added, the game *again* disappoints, as most are hidden in boxes along your path – so you end up blindly smashing everything rather than hunting.

When fighting Mewbies, certain player or enemy moves can make the camera struggle – and I also experienced some framerate issues when there were several foes on the screen. The battles are quick, and I tired from seeing the same enemies over and over.

Your performance in each large battle is graded on a C-to-S scale, and a final score is assessed at the end of the level for bonus XP. I figured battles would get more involved given all the different moves you can unlock for each brother, but they never did.

So . . . there's a lot to complain about in this game. But, thankfully, the narrative is honestly a high point. I found the story charming and, despite all the flaws, it kept me engaged.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutants Unleashed lacks polish and demands too much patience. If the battle system were more engaging, and if the two-player made sense, it might be worth recommending. But as it stands now, it's a tough sell. **— BRETT**

6.5

SW CH PUBLISHER: OUTRIGHT GAMES DEVELOPER: A HEARTFUL OF GAMES RATING: E10+

Zelda XXI: The Adventure of Zelda

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: ECHOES OF WISDOM

AT LONG LAST, the princess is the protagonist.

The Legend of Zelda series has been around for nearly 40 years now – but across those four decades' worth of sequels and spin-offs, the titular character has almost always been an uncontrollable NPC. A damsel in distress. A motivating factor for the franchise's real hero, Link, to get up out of bed, head out the door and have himself another big adventure. But finally – *finally* – after years of fan requests, Nintendo has let Zelda herself take the lead. And just as those fans had predicted, she's just as compelling of a lead character as her green-capped counterpart.

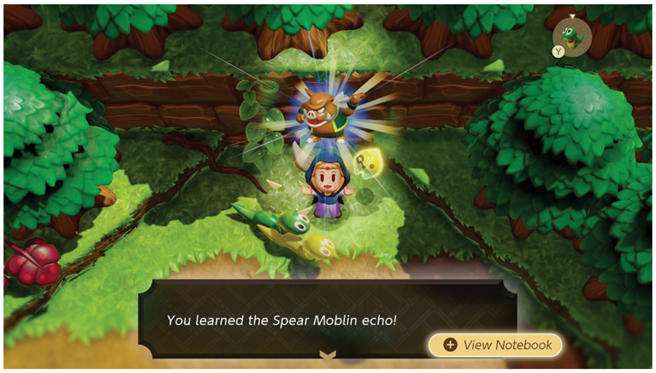
The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom is at its best when it leans into its new lead and the fresh gameplay ideas that were invented to set her apart from the series' past. It does falter a bit, though, in the moments when it loses that focus and slips back into being another traditional Link quest.

First, the good. The core mechanic introduced just for Zelda, and which the series has never seen before, is her power to summon enemies and objects to serve her. Link has always been a warrior, armed with all sorts of weapons and items to wield to solve puzzles and attack any enemies in his way. Zelda plays more like a wizard: a conjurer who can call upon any foe she's faced in the past, or even any common piece of furniture, to help her overcome the obstacles set before her.

Summoning Echoes is both fun and freeing – there are so many of them that every player of the game will naturally find their own favorites and approach both puzzles and combat in ways no other player thought to. When faced with a fierce foe, what would your approach be? Would you call on your most powerful lone warrior, like a sword-wielding Moblin or an axe-using Darknut, and have them go one-on-one against the opponent? Or would you swarm them with half a dozen snakes or bats or blobs instead?

When faced with a tricky bit of platforming or other environmental traversal, would you try to protect Zelda from the traps trying to trip her up, or find a way to "cheat" and bypass the situation altogether? When the developers present a puzzle with an obvious intended solution, would you play it as they expected most players would, or still try to blaze your own trail?

To play Echoes of Wisdom is to be constantly asked those questions and constantly have to come up with the answers that would be the most fun for you. It's the most free-wheeling and open 2D title this series has ever seen, and it is genuinely enjoyable to have so few restrictions in place.



So the entire Echoes system? Great. Superb. The idea of it was excellent, and the execution excels as well.

. . . Except for in the menu system. As I feared, the overwhelming quantity of Echoes overflows the reasonable usability of the menu that you have to select between them. It's not bad in the beginning, when you have only a handful of Echoes that Zelda has learned – choosing which to use from just a few options takes only a second or two. But by the end of the game, when your Echo total is getting up close to 100? That same simple menu is annoyingly overcrowded, and it takes far too long to scroll backward and forward along its too-lengthy list to find the one specific creature or thing you're wanting to summon.

And some of the Echoes are totally redundant with one another! That got my goat most of all. For example, you can summon a simple Pot. No problem – that's a staple of the series, and it even has added functionality in this quest since Zelda can jump inside one and hide from enemies like Solid Snake ducking under a cardboard box. That's brilliant! But then you get to the Gerudo area, and there's a Gerudo Pot Echo. It has the exact same function in gameplay – it's just cosmetically different. Then, after that, there's a third variety you come across – and, again, the only thing different about it is the look of the pottery. You'll never have any practical need for either the second or third style of Pot, but if you choose to learn those Echoes, then they're permanently listed among all your other Echoes for the rest of the game, extending the time it takes to scroll through the menu for no good reason.

None of that is a *major* problem. But it's just like, OK Nintendo, you all really couldn't come up with a better way to organize things? How hard would it have been to offer an option to turn off unwanted Echoes? They could've done better.

While I'm being negative, though, let me air my real grievance with this first Zelda-starring Zelda game: It's when they force Link back into the playable role!

Early in the adventure, Zelda earns the power to transform into what is called "Swordfighter" mode. It's a Link transformation. She lets Link's spirit inhabit her, putting on his signature windsock-shaped cap and wielding his classic weapons: his sword, his bow and his endless supply of bombs. An energy meter is tied to this transformation, as it's temporary, but fallen foes often drop small energy refills.

Swordfighter mode is such a weak idea. What a disappointment it is that in Zelda's first big mainline starring role, the most powerful trump card she can play in battle is to just shapeshift back into the series' usual male hero for 30 seconds. It genuinely upset me that they couldn't come up with something better or more original than that.

If Zelda needed to be able to attack foes directly rather than relying on her summons to do her fighting for her, then I get why they'd give her a time-limited weapon of her own. Just, why did it have to be her "becoming" Link in those moments? Give Zelda her own weapon! Give her that quick-striking Rapier from the Hyrule Warriors series. Have a cutscene where Impa gifts her a Sheikah spear or something – and explains the energy meter mechanic as part of her people's ancient lore. Heck, give her the Bow of Light that has been the traditional weapon used by previous Zeldas! Why is she picking up and using specifically *Link's Bow?* She has her own!

OK, OK. Rant over. I didn't want to fixate quite so much on that since the rest of this game is honestly so well-made and wonderful, and Zelda as a character really is done great justice other than in those few moments.

Let's close things out with more positive points to counterbalance those bad vibes I just brought. The land of Hyrule is beautiful in this installment, and so well-realized: It's nostalgic in the sense that the middle of the map is all a direct homage to A Link to the Past, but then the borders of the explorable space were wildly extended in all directions beyond the bounds of that old game, giving the designers a chance to place all the great recurring races like the Gorons and Zoras and even the Deku Scrubs within this same world. That rocks. The "Still World" sequences in which Zelda dives into magical pools of evil and rescues lost characters, then heals the broken parts of the world? Amazing. Loved that. The playfulness of the characters. The callbacks to so many classic enemies. The music! I loved every track. I thought they did so well with that.

There is just so much to love in The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom. I have my two big complaints, as you've just read, but the fact that I could get so worked up about any perceived slight or shortcoming is, I think, just a testament to how long I've loved this series, and how much I've longed for Zelda herself to truly step into its spotlight. At long last, she has! **– LUCAS**

9.0

Nintendo's Most Terrifying Tale

EMIO – THE SMILING MAN: FAMICOM DETECTIVE CLUB

YOSHIO SAKAMOTO is not afraid of fear.

One of Nintendo's most celebrated developers, he's been a prolific and prominent part of major first-party products going all the way back to his earliest days as an employee in 1982. The limited technology of that era kept fear-focused game genres like survival horror from really taking off – their rise wouldn't truly begin until a few hardware generations later – and yet, even working with only 8-bit tech, some of Sakamoto's earliest titles still managed to tap into true feelings of tension and unease. He helped shape the lonely, creepy corridors of the first Metroid adventure, and then brought us back-to-back murder mysteries in the first two installments of Famicom Detective Club. Only one of those two brands flourished, so Sakamoto grew to be known as "the Metroid guy" – but still found ways to inject fear into the series' sequels, like Metroid Dread.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO EPD & MAGES RATING: M

Now, at long last, he's finally had the chance to revisit his other '80s IP with a brand-new sequel – and with technology no longer limiting any aspect of his creativity, he's leaned fully into his darkest impulses and crafted the most gruesome, most sinister and most hauntingly evil story to ever be published as a Nintendo first-party product.

Emio - The Smiling Man is rated M for Mature – becoming the first game ever developed within Nintendo's walls to earn that age-limiting warning label – and its truly disturbing scenes with numerous depictions of death and graphic violence more than justify that rating. It's not just a marketing ploy to get more eyes on this niche series – I wouldn't even let my kids into the room when I was playing this one. It is genuinely filled with content that children shouldn't see.

Rather than the ghost stories that fueled the narratives of The Missing Heir and The Girl Who Stands Behind, this game instead centers itself on the urban legend of "The Smiling Man."

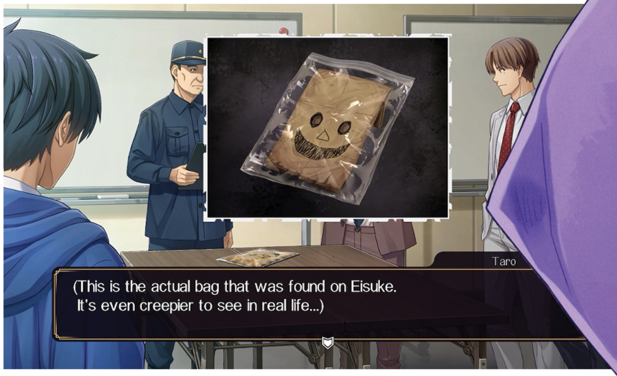
It's said that The Smiling Man appears in front of crying young girls, offering to give them "a smile that will last forever" . . . by murdering them, then placing a paper bag over their heads with a crude smiley face scrawled across it. He wears a similar bag over his own head, obscuring his identity and ensuring his unmoving grin is the last thing his victims ever see.

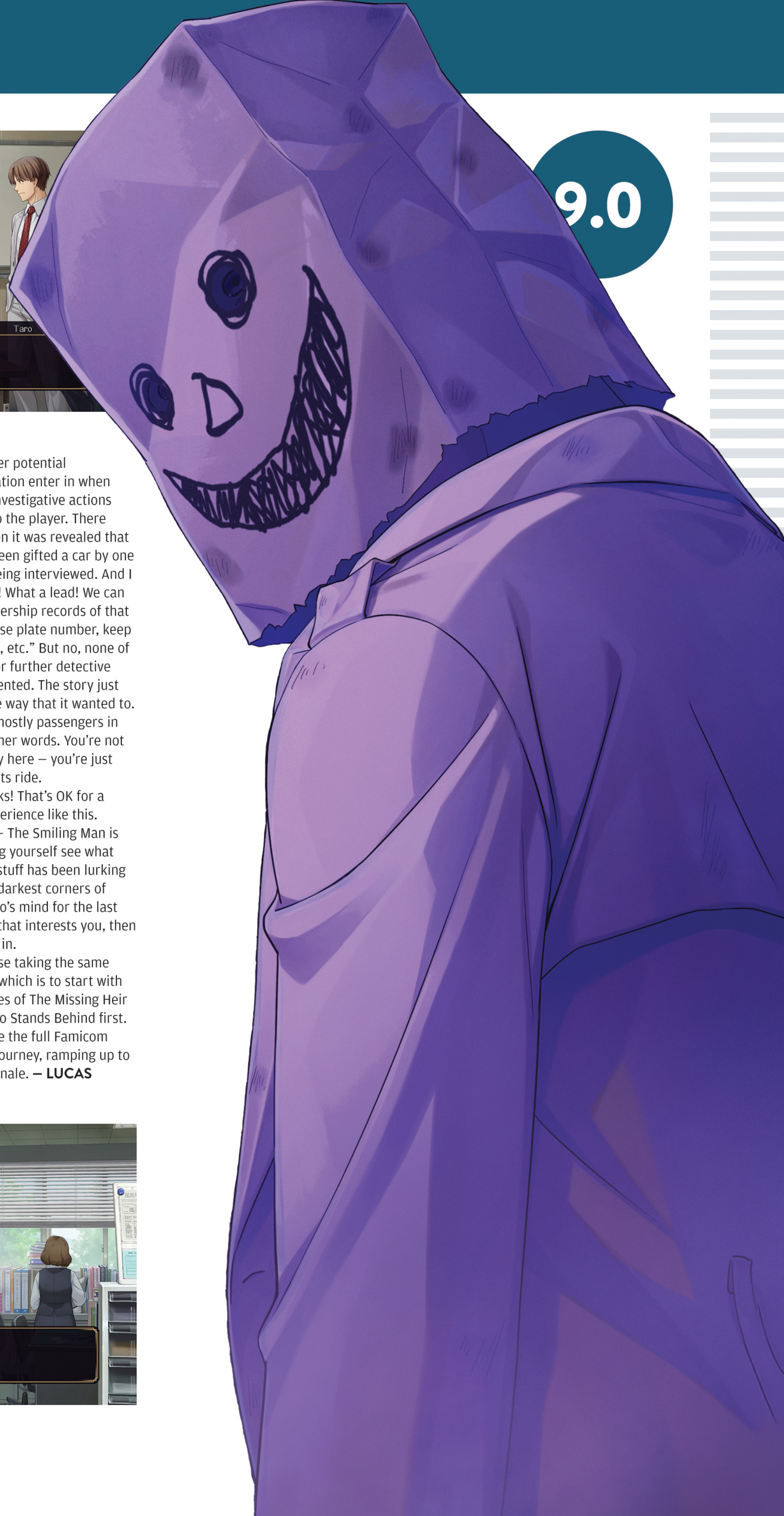
The legend of The Smiling Man seems to have been born out of a series of grisly murders that happened 18 years earlier, as the game begins. Those cases were never solved, but they're thrust back into the spotlight when a new victim is found with a smiley-faced paper bag over his head. The titular Detective Club arrives on the scene to begin to investigate, and the story develops from there.

In the real world, it's been decades since the last new story in this series. But in the game world, only two years have passed since the events of The Missing Heir – so our returning protagonist is now 19 years old, as is his partner in crime-solving, Ayumi.

Ayumi Tachibana has always been considered the real hero of this series, despite appearing only in a supporting role in the first two games. She was even considered for Smash Bros. at one point! Here in this new sequel, thankfully, her role is expanded more than ever – the game actually shifts perspectives multiple times throughout its dozen chapters, so sometimes the playable character is "Taro Ninten" and sometimes it's Ayumi herself! The two of them tag-team the investigation as a duo, interviewing different witnesses and exploring different areas throughout each day, then coming back together at the Utsugi Detective Agency office at the end of the day to compare notes. (Mr. Utsugi, as usual, is gone for most of the story. But that pays off well in the end.)

Also, we learn throughout this tale that Ayumi was once a member of her school's naginata club, so if Sakurai wanted to revisit the idea of adding her to the Smash roster for the next sequel in that series, she has a unique weapon proficiency now in canon!





9.0

Gameplaywise, Emio – The Smiling Man flows better than the previous Detective Club titles. Not once did I ever get stuck while playing this one! No frustrations or frictions whatsoever — and no need to ever turn to an online FAQ to figure out what to do next. You simply question the people in front of you or highlight areas of interest in the scene with the Look/Examine command and each chapter makes continuous, natural progress.

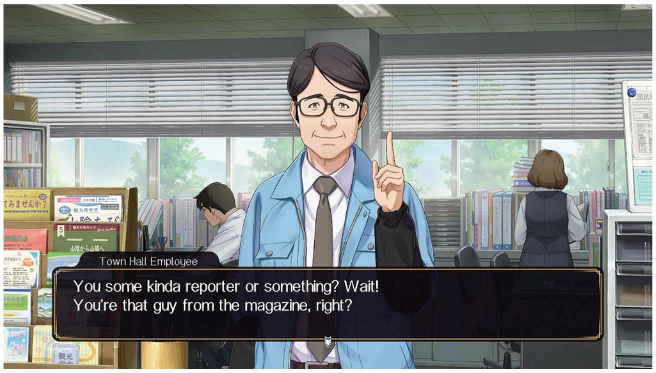
That said, there are some scenes that feel like they're overstaying their welcome. The menacing premise of this game, and its imposing antagonist, are truly interesting and keep your attention firmly fixed . . . most of the time. There are some fairly long stretches of the investigation where the looming threat of Emio seems to fade into the background a bit too far as you deal with other topics and subplots that can seem unrelated. (Taro and Ayumi, despite a ton of chemistry on-screen in the previous games, have apparently still never started officially dating each other, so there's a whole story thread woven in here about how Taro might've dropped the ball with her when another suitor enters the picture. Those scenes do offer a break from all the death and brutality, though, so they're not bad.)

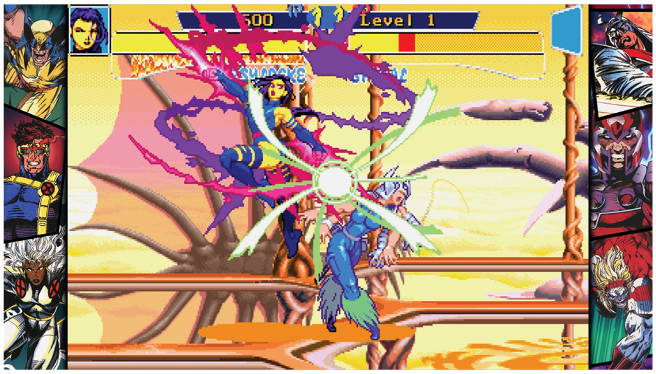
The only other potential points of frustration enter in when some obvious investigative actions aren't offered to the player. There was a point when it was revealed that a suspect had been gifted a car by one of the people being interviewed. And I thought, "Great! What a lead! We can look up the ownership records of that car, run its license plate number, keep an eye out for it, etc." But no, none of those choices for further detective work were presented. The story just continued in the way that it wanted to.

Players are mostly passengers in this game, in other words. You're not driving the story here — you're just taken along on its ride.

But that works! That's OK for a visual novel experience like this. "Playing" Emio – The Smiling Man is really just letting yourself see what kind of twisted stuff has been lurking in the deepest, darkest corners of Yoshio Sakamoto's mind for the last few decades. If that interests you, then you should dive in.

But I do advise taking the same approach I did, which is to start with the 2021 remakes of The Missing Heir and The Girl Who Stands Behind first. Let yourself take the full Famicom Detective Club journey, ramping up to this fear-filled finale. **— LUCAS**





Never Thought We'd See the Day!

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM FIGHTING COLLECTION: ARCADE CLASSICS

IN THE EARLY '90S, Marvel and Capcom joined forces to revolutionize the fighting game genre in arcades around the world. After a successful first jaunt with a beat-'em-up take on The Punisher, Capcom would go on to create a new breed of fighting game based on Marvel's band of merry mutants, the X-Men. From there, they expanded beyond those pages into a game featuring characters from all across the Marvel Universe in Marvel Super Heroes.

And then things got interesting.

Following a guest appearance by Street Fighter secret boss Akuma, Capcom decided to take the logical next step and gave us X-Men vs. Street Fighter, soon followed by Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter. And it was good. Yet, there was still more they could do, to go further beyond!

Enter: Marvel vs. Capcom: Clash of Super Heroes. At long last, heroes from all across both companies' best and biggest brands were ready to throw down in a brawl to settle it all. A war to settle the score! That is, until Marvel vs. Capcom 2: New Age of Heroes came along to up the ante like never before. This chocolate & peanut butter combination was far greater than the sum of its parts, as fans of both companies around the world celebrated and performed crazy combos and moves that were beyond what anyone had ever seen before. The fun continued as the games were ported to home consoles throughout the '90s and into the new millennium.

. . . Except for one group.

If you were a diehard Nintendo enthusiast, then you were unfortunately S.O.L. (straight outta luck). It seemed that every single major home console of the era got in on the action, but if you spent your hard-earned allowance on a Nintendo 64 or GameCube, then you were left on the sidelines (or in the arcades).

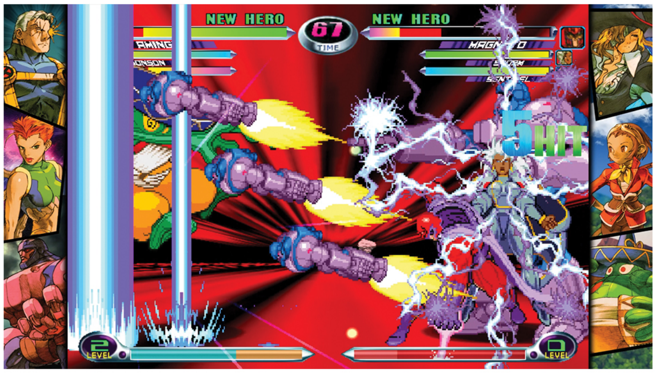
That's continued to be the case for decades, even with various sequels and re-releases . . . until now. With the arrival of Marvel vs. Capcom Fighting Collection: Arcade Classics on the Nintendo Switch, those who remember growing up playing Mega Man and Strider on the NES, or Captain Commando and Street Fighter II on the Super NES, can finally enjoy their characters in crossover fighting game form without having to cross company lines.

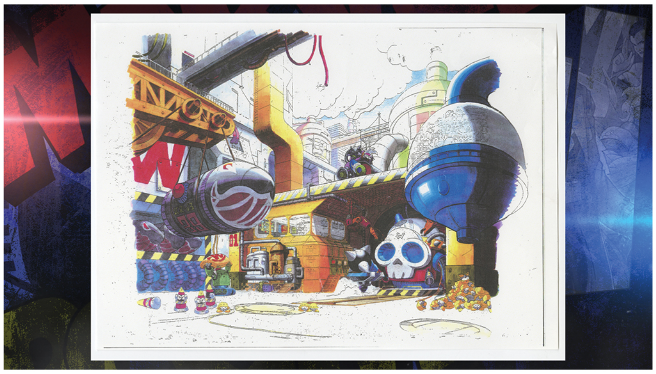
This collection contains all seven titles described above – yes, even The Punisher, the game that started it all – in both English and Japanese versions. (So if you insist that the Blue Bomber can only ever be referred to as "Rockman," then you're covered.) But these are strictly the arcade versions, so bonus features added to home versions are largely, if not entirely M.I.A.

And it's jam-packed with other features, too, from Fighter Award challenges (Achievements) to a gallery full of production and promotional artwork, arcade flyers and music. There are 14 different menu languages to choose from, adjustable levels of volume for music, sound effects, announcers and just the game's overall sound, and even different jingles for when a new challenger appears.

Each game contains a training mode, and two sets of options menus: one before you start the game and the other after. Before you start, you can adjust difficulty, attack power, timer speed, whether automatic/manual modes can be selected, game speed, coin settings (free play, or how many "coins" need to be "inserted" for a credit), boot display and reducing light intensity. Inside the game, you can adjust your controller settings, view arcade marquees that explain certain mechanics you'll need to know, move lists, your standard emulation display settings (filters, borders, etc.), and a quick save/load option, which is unfortunately relegated to a single game at a time – there are seven games, but only one of them can have its progress saved at any given time (so use it wisely).

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RATING: T





Incidentally, I normally don't go for filters in these collections, but some of the ones here work pretty well, I think. Type B looked pretty good to me, personally.

Now, I have to admit that I was a bit apprehensive about playing this collection on the Switch, at least initially, and that's simply because of the, shall we say, *variable* nature of the Switch's D-Pads. From the four buttons on the Joy-Cons to the roll of the dice as to whether your Pro Controller contains a central pivot or not, the Switch's standard D-Pads are not what we've become accustomed to from the company in the past. And for a title – or collection – as competitively minded as this, that is a bit of a concern.

Fortunately, my fears were unfounded (at least somewhat). While my inputs weren't as precise as I would like for them to be, there are workarounds that still make this an enjoyable experience.

In addition to being able to adjust the difficulty of computer opponents, there are options to assign special moves to buttons, or even go with a designated "Special Move" button that is perhaps best described as like the Special Move button in Smash Bros., where a regular press performs a special move, and adding certain directions allows you to perform other moves, while a Hyper Combo button performs similarly for those moves.

Unless you've got a controller that allows for precise D-Pad inputs (or you're just really skilled with an analog stick), you're probably not going to want to use the Switch version for serious, tournament-level competition. But if you're just looking for a fun single-player experience, or to play with friends, it works.

Ah, but what if you *don't* want to play with friends, and prefer strangers? Well, online is here, too (except for The Punisher), and I took it for a spin. After a rocky start trying to find a match in X-Men on a Saturday night, it got quicker and quicker. The games were playable, but a little sluggish. I managed to win three of my four test matches well enough.

When these games first came out, I was not the fan of Marvel characters such as Iron Man and Captain America that I am today. As such, I'm finally glad to have the opportunity to go back and see what these games had to offer at the time – and thanks to the bevy of options, it should be accessible enough for just about any fan of the characters to pick up and see what they were doing before the MCU became a thing. **– DAVID**

9.5

Edgeworth's Adventures

ACE ATTORNEY INVESTIGATIONS COLLECTION

IF IT HADN'T BEEN for Capcom's ports of the original Ace Attorney to PC and current-gen systems, we never would've gotten The Great Ace Attorney, the Apollo Justice trilogy remaster and, now, this Ace Attorney Investigations duology – including, for the first time outside of Japan, Ace Attorney Investigations 2: Prosecutor's Gambit. To think that over 10 years ago, Capcom said that the sales wouldn't justify the localization and release of AAI2! And now here we are.

While both games are presented in both original pixel and HD graphic form, I played them in the HD format, since it was a lot more aesthetically pleasing on a large screen. Along with the two games, there's also a music player and a concept art gallery, and you can start either game at any point in the investigation, or enable Story Mode to have the game's investigation mechanics played for you. This is the quality we've come to expect from the recent Ace Attorney series ports, and I'm glad it could be continued here. (Unfortunately, a number of typos and simple grammar errors in the text of the second game detract from the collection's overall presentation.)

The Investigation games have many of the same mechanics as the mainline Ace Attorney titles, but Miles instead uses his logic to link together clues and compare evidence, finding potential contradictions at the scene of the crime. There's still lots of shouting out "Objection!" and "Hold It!" when Miles is debating crime scene findings with an opponent. Instead of the investigation portions being presented as a static image with a first-person view, Miles and his partner move about in a top-down view between screens.

AAI2 adds a new mechanic, Mind Chess, which pits Edgeworth against his opponents in a battle of wits, their resolve represented by various chess pieces. Through reading their mood, you can either go on the offensive and try to make them talk, or hold back to let them drop their guard and allow yourself an opening. In fact, chess itself is a major theme of the story, and it's interesting to see how it's woven into the overall narrative.

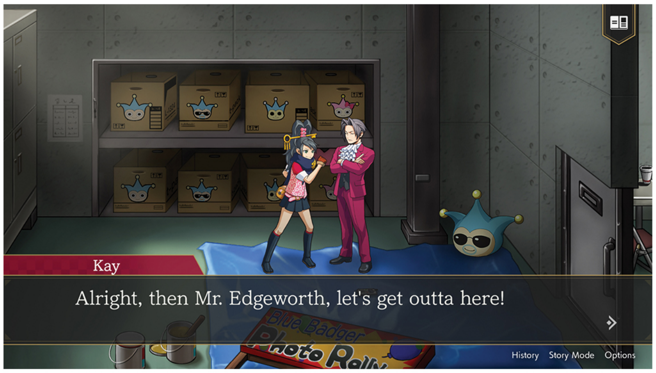
Out of the two games, I prefer Prosecutor's Gambit a lot more. While the original Investigations gave us a couple of great new characters, like Miles' self-proclaimed assistant Kay Faraday and the hardboiled detective Tyrell Badd, the story felt somewhat weak compared to other titles in the series. It starts with a thrilling introduction, but it's actually *in medias res* and left me a little confused at one point. There are some appearances from some of the mainline games' characters (both as cameos and as witnesses), but I wished Ema Skye would've had a larger role that didn't feel like it was shoehorned in. Also, once you've witnessed the scene with the Proto Badger, prepare for a sleepless night! (If you know, you know.)

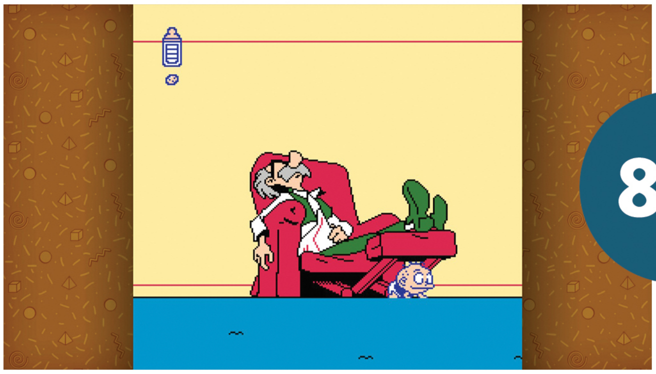
Prosecutor's Gambit takes one of the plot points of the first game and brings it to a thrilling conclusion, weaving together events from not only Miles' past, but also his father, Gregory's. It also has Miles doing some serious self-reflection about his career path, thanks to the influence of his father's former partner, Eddie Fender, as well as some executive meddling by Judge Verity Gavèlle of the Committee for Prosecutorial Excellence, who apparently has Miles in her crosshairs. Prosecutor's Gambit's storytelling is on par with the last two Ace Attorney games, with a series of seemingly unrelated events ensnaring Miles and his allies with assassination plots and international intrigue with earth-shattering consequences.

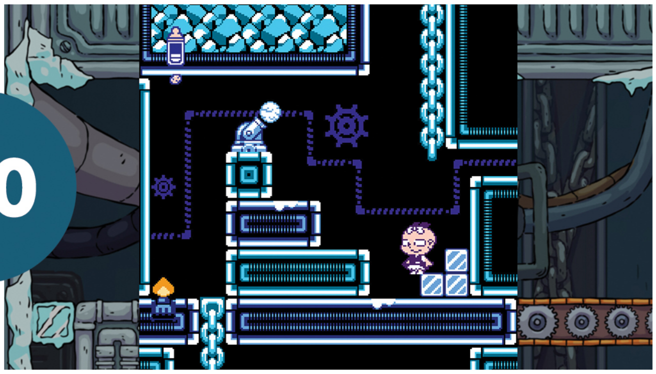
We've finally got all the canonical Ace Attorney games on modern systems! And this is one not to be missed, especially if you're a fan of Miles Edgeworth and his character arc. Investigations 1 has its weaknesses, but it's still a solid title, while Investigations 2 is a must-play on the strength of its storytelling alone.
– REBECCA

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RATING: T







8.0

The Nicktoon Tie-in That Never Was

RUGRATS: ADVENTURES IN GAMELAND

I WAS THERE.

I was there, seated, staring at the screen on August 11, 1991. It was a Sunday morning.

I was three weeks shy of my 10th birthday, and in my final days as a 9-year-old I'd been entirely taken in by a new advertising blitz on Nickelodeon – they'd been promoting the arrival of three brand-new cartoons, all set to debut on the same day, and all known collectively as "Nicktoons." The lineup included Doug, a show about an imaginative tween navigating the ups and downs of middle school; Ren & Stimpy, a wild half-hour avalanche of absolute nonsense; and sandwiched between those two, Rugrats, a cartoon chronicling the adventures of four babies trying to make sense of the world.

I enjoyed Doug and continued to tune in to it in the years that followed. I didn't connect much with the manic energy of Ren & Stimpy, so it became a low priority for further viewing. But Rugrats I adored, as the ground-floor stories of Tommy, Chuckie, Phil and Lil toddling their way through situations that were totally foreign to their still-developing brains were hilarious. I began to look forward to the inevitable video game version of the series, as in those days just about every kids' show of even middling success would get some sort of tie-in video game.

Unfortunately, Rugrats did not. Not right away, at least – it took until 1998 for the babies' first game to go on sale. And that one was a PlayStation exclusive, so I missed it too!

By the time the Rugrats brand finally got a game on a Nintendo platform, I was 17 years old and had moved on from waiting. I haven't paid any real attention to Rugrats video games for decades since . . . until this new/old game was revealed!

Rugrats: Adventures in Gameland is the NES game this show should've sent to store shelves over 30 years ago. It literally is an NES game, too – a real cartridge version was sold by Limited Run Games that works on original 8-bit hardware. That's pretty niche by this point, though, so the game is also being sold elsewhere, like the Switch port that I played for review. On the Switch, the 8-bit version is packaged alongside its own "HD remake," and you can swap between both styles.

Adventures in Gameland is a great NES game. It pays homage to classics like Super Mario Bros. 2 first and foremost, with the four babies being gameplay-style counterparts to Mario, Luigi, Toad and the Princess from that old masterpiece: Chuckie gets the leg-flailing higher jumps, Lil can float for a while if you keep the jump button held down, etc. But you can tell that three more decades' worth of game design knowledge has informed its structure and how it handles. It's polished, fun, and offers a reasonable challenge.

Adventures in Gameland is not so great, though, when played in its HD mode. The graphics are beautiful – the characters and environments look like they've been perfectly pulled from a Nicktoon broadcast – but the gameplay gets crippled by terrible cropping. All of the game's levels were made with the 4:3 NES screen ratio in mind, so when it zooms in to fill the 16:9 ratio of HD displays, tons of the playable space gets cut off. Enemies and items get cropped out, and it's a constant headache. You'll be moving along and a Thwomp-like smashing enemy will just drop on your head out of nowhere – because while it was visible in 8-bit mode, the cropping cut it off in HD.

Ultimately I played through and enjoyed this adventure as the NES game it was primarily made to be, only swapping into HD every once in a while to satisfy my onlooking kids' curiosity. I recommend the same approach for anyone else out there who's also been waiting for this game for over 33 years! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: THE MIX GAMES DEVELOPERS: THE MIX GAMES & WALLRIDE RATING: E

Hands-On Hacking

YARS RISING

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ATARI
DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD
RATING: E10+

YARS' REVENGE IS a classic Atari 2600 game about an alien housefly (called a Yar), who's out to stop the enemy Qotile from destroying its civilization. It's a single-screen affair, where you fly around avoiding seeker missiles and deadly swirl attacks, while trying to break through – or "nibble" away – the Qotile's defenses so you can then destroy it with your Zorlon cannon.

What does this all have to do with a modern exploratory action game starring a young hacker trying to infiltrate a giant, evil corporation? Quite a bit, surprisingly!

At first glance, Yars Rising seems to have very little to do with Yars' Revenge outside of some references to Atari's history. Your character Emi goes by the nickname Yar, the evil corporation is called QoTech, save points are Computer Space arcade cabinets, etc. But the deeper you get into the adventure, the more it becomes clear that the links to Atari's past are more than just skin-deep.

Like any good Metroid-style game, learning new abilities is the key to accessing new areas on the map, and Emi earns these abilities by hacking various terminals. And how do you hack a terminal? By literally playing variations of Yars' Revenge – that eventually grow to include elements from Yars' Return, Centipede, Missile Command and more.

The new abilities earned come by way of augmenting Emi's DNA. This is a really cool concept . . . that the game unfortunately doesn't really follow through with exploring. The story eventually winds up tying in pretty directly with the original game's lore (which I won't spoil the details of here), and that includes Emi's new abilities manifesting in bug-like ways, like sprouting wings. There's a boss in the game who, after you defeat her, tells you that she used to be just like you before the continued augmentations turned her into the monster she became. This is never really touched on again, with the exception of, oddly enough, the game's key art. (See Page 3.) That cool-looking bug woman standing behind Emi isn't actually a character in the game. According to WayForward, it's supposed to be a representation of her growing abilities, a notion that is, at best, vaguely hinted at in the game's abilities menu.

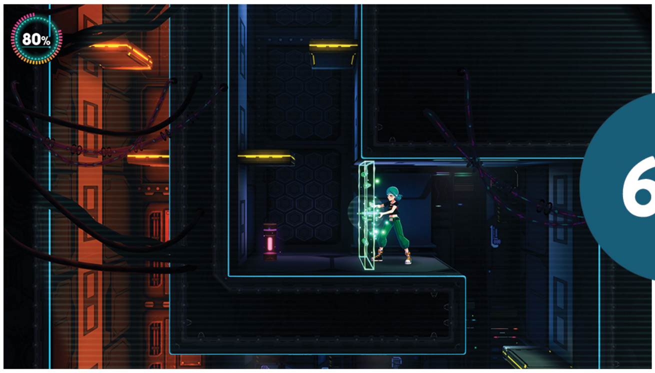
This is emblematic of Yars' biggest problem overall: The whole time I was playing, I kept asking myself, "Who is this for?" The Atari references are neat for old guys like myself, but the dialogue can best be described as a strikingly accurate expression of that Steve Buscemi "How do you do, fellow kids?" meme. Emi and her hacker friends constantly speak in what sounds like excruciatingly forced young person lingo – especially Emi, who's frequently dropping quips that come off as what a corporate executive thinks the dialogue in Guardians of the Galaxy sounded like. It's all so extremely at odds with itself, and at times quite literally made me cringe.

That's not to say that none of the humor works. I reluctantly found myself succumbing to Emi's charm from time to time, as some of the things she says about the environments and enemies are actually genuinely funny. But, on the whole, it simply wasn't good.

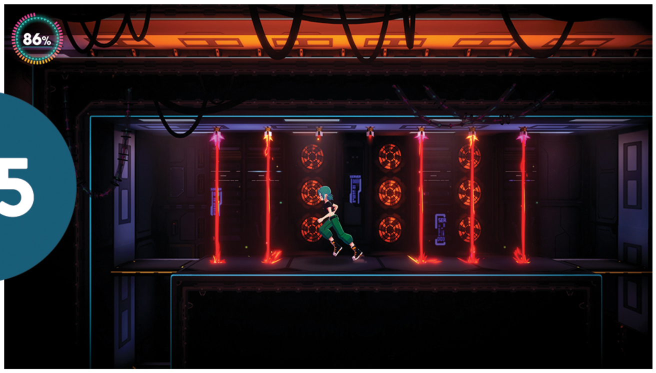
There are a few other notable issues, like the equipment menu, the less-than-stellar loading times and the stealth mechanics being almost completely abandoned within the first hour or so of the game, but at the end of the day, they never really stopped me from having fun.

Yars Rising is a genuinely solid game. I'm not sure it's special enough to recommend over the dozens, if not hundreds, of other Metroid-style offerings on the Switch, but you could certainly do worse.

It's a strange direction to take the Yars brand in, but WayForward seems to have achieved what they were trying to achieve here. (It's just that what they were trying to achieve is something undoubtedly odd.) **– KRIS**



6.5



ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the last two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Ace Angler: Fishing Spirits	6.5	Rebecca	#63
Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp	9.5	Lucas	#65
AEW: Fight Forever	7.0	David	#67
AI: The Somnium Files – nirvanA Initiative	8.0	Tony	#62
Another Code: Recollection	8.0	J.-Charles	#70
Another Crab's Treasure	8.5	Lucas	#72
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney Trilogy	8.5	Rebecca	#70
Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration	9.5	Kris	#64
Atelier Ryza 3: Alchemist of the End & The Secret Key	9.0	Thor	#67
Baten Kaitos I & II HD Remaster	8.0	Lucas	#68
Bayonetta 3	9.0	Jonathan	#63
Bayonetta Origins: Cereza and the Lost Demon	8.0	Jonathan	#65
Bluey: The Videogame	7.0	Lucas	#70
ConnecTank	7.5	Lucas	#67
Demon Slayer -Kimetsu no Yaiba- Sweep the Board!	6.5	Emma	#72
Detective Pikachu Returns	6.0	Lucas	#68
Digimon Survive	8.0	Maggie	#63
Disney Illusion Island	6.5	J.-Charles	#68
DNF Duel	8.0	Sean	#66
Double Dragon Gaiden: Rise of the Dragons	8.0	Kris	#67
Dragon Quest Monsters: The Dark Prince	9.0	Lucas	#72
Dragon Quest Treasures	8.0	Matthew T.	#64
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron HD Remaster	8.5	Jonathan	#72
Endless Ocean: Luminous	5.0	Lucas	#72
Everybody 1-2-Switch!	7.5	Kris	#67
Fashion Dreamer	7.0	Rebecca	#69
Fire Emblem Engage	8.5	Rebecca	#64
Game Center CX: Arino no Chousenjou 1+2 Replay	9.0	Jonathan	#73
Harvest Moon: The Winds of Anthos	7.0	Emma	#73
Harvestella	8.0	Nadia	#63
Hot Wheels Unleashed 2: Turbocharged	8.5	Lucas	#72
Infinity Strash: Dragon Quest – The Adventure of Dai	5.0	Lucas	#68
Jack Jeanne	10	Maggie	#72
JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: All-Star Battle R	6.5	Tony	#62
Kirby's Return to Dream Land Deluxe	9.0	Lucas	#65
Loop8: Summer of Gods	6.0	Maggie	#66
Luigi's Mansion 2 HD	9.0	Lucas	#73
Mario + Rabbids Sparks of Hope	9.0	Lucas	#63
Mario vs. Donkey Kong	7.5	Lucas	#70
Master Detective Archives: Rain Code	7.0	Matthew T.	#67
Mega Man Battle Network Legacy Collection	8.0	David	#65
Metal Gear Solid Master Collection Vol. 1	8.5	Kris	#71
Metroid Prime Remastered	10	Lucas	#64
Nickelodeon Kart Racers 3: Slime Speedway	8.0	David	#63
Nintendo World Championships: NES Edition	6.0	Kris	#73
Octopath Traveler II	8.5	Rebecca	#65
Otogi Katsugeki Mameda no Bakeru: Oracle Saitorou no Sainan!!	**9.0**	**Lucas**	**#71**
Pac-Man World Re-Pac	7.5	Lucas	#62
Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door	10	Lucas	#72
Persona 3 Portable	9.0	Maggie	#70
Persona 5 Tactica	9.0	Lucas	#71
Pikmin 4	10	Lucas	#67
Pocky & Rocky Reshrined	8.5	Lucas	#69
Pokémon Scarlet	8.5	Lucas	#63
Pokémon Violet	8.5	Lucas	#63
Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown	9.0	Derrick	#70
Princess Peach: Showtime!	7.5	Kris	#71
Puzzle Bobble Everybubble!	8.0	Jonathan	#67
Rain on Your Parade	8.0	Lucas	#65
Rune Factory 3 Special	7.5	Rebecca	#68
Samba de Amigo: Party Central	7.0	J.-Charles	#69
Sea of Stars	9.5	Kris	#68
Shiren the Wanderer: The Mystery Dungeon of Serpentcoil Island	8.5	Lucas	#71
Shiren the Wanderer: The Tower of Fortune and the Dice of Fate	8.5	Lucas	#69
Silent Hope	8.0	Brett	#69
Sonic Frontiers	7.0	Tony	#64
Sonic Origins Plus	8.0	Tony	#67
Sonic Superstars	8.5	Lucas	#69
Splatoon 3	9.0	Lucas	#62
Star Ocean: The Second Story R	7.0	Maggie	#69
Story of Seasons: A Wonderful Life	7.0	Rebecca	#67
Super Bomberman R 2	8.0	Lucas	#71
Super Mario Bros. Wonder	9.0	Lucas	#69
Super Mario RPG	9.5	Lucas	#69
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Rumble	8.5	David	#73
Tactics Ogre: Reborn	8.5	Lucas	#71
Taiko no Tatsujin: Rhythm Festival	8.0	J.-Charles	#63
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Cowabunga Collection	9.0	David	#62
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Arcade: Wrath of the Mutants	6.5	David & Tony	#72
The Legend of Heroes: Trails from Zero	9.0	Maggie	#62
The Legend of Heroes: Trails into Reverie	10	Maggie	#67
The Legend of Heroes: Trails through Daybreak	9.5	Maggie	#73
The Legend of Heroes: Trails to Azure	10	Maggie	#65
The Legend of Nayuta: Boundless Trails	8.0	Maggie	#68
The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom	10	Lucas	#66
Theatrhythm Final Bar Line	9.0	J.-Charles	#65
Unicorn Overlord	9.0	J.-Charles	#71
WarioWare: Move It!	8.0	Rebecca	#69
We Love Katamari REROLL + Royal Reverie	9.5	Jonathan	#66
Wunderling DX	8.0	Lucas	#64
Xenoblade Chronicles 3	10	Maggie	#62

SECOND OPINION
BAKERU

I'D BE LYING if I claimed that my primary interest in Good-Feel's Bakeru wasn't predicated on its resemblance to Konami's long-dormant Ganbare Goemon series. Both invite travelers to an exaggerated pastiche of the whole Japanese nation – though Bakeru's road trip is set firmly in the present, unlike Goemon's anachronistic Edo era exploits.

"Road trip," by the by, is the operative phrase. Our titular shapeshifting tanuki, tasked with awakening the hypnotized masses trapped in an endless festival, treats his cross-country quest as a sightseeing opportunity. Bakeru visits each of Japan's 47 prefectures, with famous landmarks and destinations recontextualized as colorful obstacle courses – dash along the rollercoaster-like Eshima Ohashi Bridge in Shimane, enjoy a bath in the hot spring town of Ginzan Onsen in Yamagata, parade down Main Street at a legally distinct Tokyo Disneyland analogue in Chiba! Even the in-game collectables, which include local souvenirs and nuggets of regional trivia, contribute to the vacation motif!

Of course, with so many prefectures to explore, plus a handful of additional locations to fill out the map, Bakeru's adventure ends up being a touch too exhaustive, mired by repetitive enemy hordes, few unique stage hazards and a difficulty curve that remains nearly flat. Then consider Bakeru's signature Henge technique, which allows him to assume the guise of four different heroes from Japanese folklore – the final transformation is earned after a mere 16 missions, meaning your growth is capped with 75% of the quest still remaining. I understand the development practice of padding a game's runtime to mask a lack of substantive content, but usually that padding is spaced more evenly to maintain a steady rhythm, not so lopsided as is the case here.

So while Bakeru didn't quite fill that Goemon-shaped hole in my heart, I wouldn't say the experience was a wash either. The pacing may take a nosedive, but the charming travelogue trappings are incentive enough to keep the journey alive. **– TONY**

6.0

COMMUNITY

TRAVELOGUE CONTINUED

SUPER THOMAS BROS. AT NINTENDO NEW YORK!

Carter, Calvin, Cooper, Colson and Chance took a bite out of the Big Apple's official Nintendo store!

IN THIS SAME spot in our last issue, I offered you all a travelogue and event report chronicling the Thomas family's long road trip to the Long Island Retro Gaming Expo. But I didn't tell the entire tale: Of course I couldn't haul all five of my Big N-obsessed sons to the Big Apple without visiting Nintendo New York!

The day before the Expo opened its doors, Mary and I braved driving our family minivan right into the middle of Manhattan to give our kids the chance to see all the sights and sounds of America's most famous city. (Incidentally, I don't recommend taking a minivan there. Times Square is no place for a Toyota Sienna.)

Navigating the traffic and finding our way to a public parking garage was slow-going and frustrating, but I of course exhibited perfect patience and expertly calmed my wife's frayed nerves. With the family truckster safely stowed, we set out on foot — first seeing the Square itself, then a nearby cookie shop (to fuel up).

We timed our arrival at the front door of Nintendo New York well, getting there just after the start of business for the day at 10 a.m. Even at that early hour, though, the place was already full of gleeful customers as we entered, all spread out and shopping across both of the two product-packed floors.

Nintendo New York is the latest version of a storefront that's actually been in operation at the famous Rockefeller Center in New York City ever since 2001. Back then it got its start as The Pokémon Center, fully dedicating its space to Pikachu and his pals when that brand was just beginning its meteoric rise. It stayed in that lane until 2005, when it shut down for a few months to remodel and reopen as the Nintendo World store, shifting to celebrating and marketing all of the Big N's biggest brands. Ultimately it was rebranded again, to its current name, Nintendo New York, in 2016. That city-specific title acknowledges the existence of other official Nintendo retail shops in other cities around the world, and now there are several in Japan — as well as another set to open soon in San Francisco.

. . . And I had never been to any of them before this family trip! Though Nintendo New York has been a hub of the community for decades, with gamers regularly gathering there to watch Nintendo Direct presentations in person or swarming to scoop up unique, store-exclusive merchandise, I never have been among those crowds myself. Until now!

My first impression of the store was that it was smaller than I'd expected it would be. Brick-and-mortar retail space is at a premium in the heart of New York, of course, so I didn't expect something the size of an old, sprawling Toys Я Us, but still it was easy to see everything inside in just a few minutes.

Though it must seem much larger if you're only three feet tall! My kids were enthralled by the spectacle of the space, from the golden Mario statue at the entrance to the massive Bowser ready to take a bite out of any guests who stray too close to his huge, hulking statue bursting out from the bottom of the staircase on the first floor. While ascending those stairs, the boys marveled at the Mushroom Kingdom flagpole rising up in the middle of them, and spied small Pikmin statues tucked into nooks and crannies nearby as well. And at the top, Link!

The arm-outstretched Tears of the Kingdom version of Link that had stood in the store for most of the last two years had been rotated out by the time we got there, with the more traditional green-clad Link taking his place in the Zelda merch section. A Pikachu statue stood nearby, holding court over the Pokémon area, and sprinkled around were designated zones for several other Nintendo franchises too, including Splatoon and Animal Crossing.

And how about the massive screens and gameplay demo kiosks? Nintendo World Championships: NES Edition was the latest first-party release on the day we visited, so it was getting play on the giant display. An interactive virtual Mario was also available, and he could respond to customers' questions and ask them some of his own too. (He asked me what my favorite Mario game of all time was, and I had to search my heart for a moment before replying "Super Mario Bros. 3.")

We actually stopped by the store twice in the same day, opting not to buy souvenirs that morning (since we still had a full day of sightseeing elsewhere to do), but after walking around The Battery, taking the Staten Island ferry back and forth in front of the Statue of Liberty and nearly getting ourselves into trouble on the subway system, we returned at the end of day and let the boys select their take-home prizes. Carter bought himself a snazzy Tears of the Kingdom T-shirt. Calvin, Cooper and Colson all opted for Pokémon products. Chance, our youngest who has just turned 2 and has had an elephant theme running through many of his toys and clothes since birth, got gifted an Elephant Mario plush (which he instantly loved and wouldn't stop hugging). I picked a few things for myself too, of course!

All in all, it was a great day of memory making. And hopefully not the last time we'll all get to go to as a family! Who knows . . . if this place stays in business for a few more decades, maybe my kids will get to take their own kids there someday. I'd be one happy Grandpa! — **LUCAS**

BOUTIQUE RETRO HARDWARE

Introducing Chromatic

The latest modern revamp of the Game Boy looks like it's going to be a winner!

ModRetro.com

WHEN IT COMES to playing classic cartridges, you've got lots of options these days: original hardware, *modified* original hardware, custom-made modern clones. The Game Boy space in particular has been a bit crowded since the release of the Analogue Pocket three years ago, but now a new competitor has appeared to try to make its own splash in that red ocean.

Meet Chromatic! This latest take on Nintendo's Game Boy aims to set itself apart, in part, with absolute accuracy and faithfulness to the old way of doing things – starting with the screen. It's built to support 160 by 144 pixels precisely, the exact old resolution of the Game Boy and Game Boy Color from decades ago.

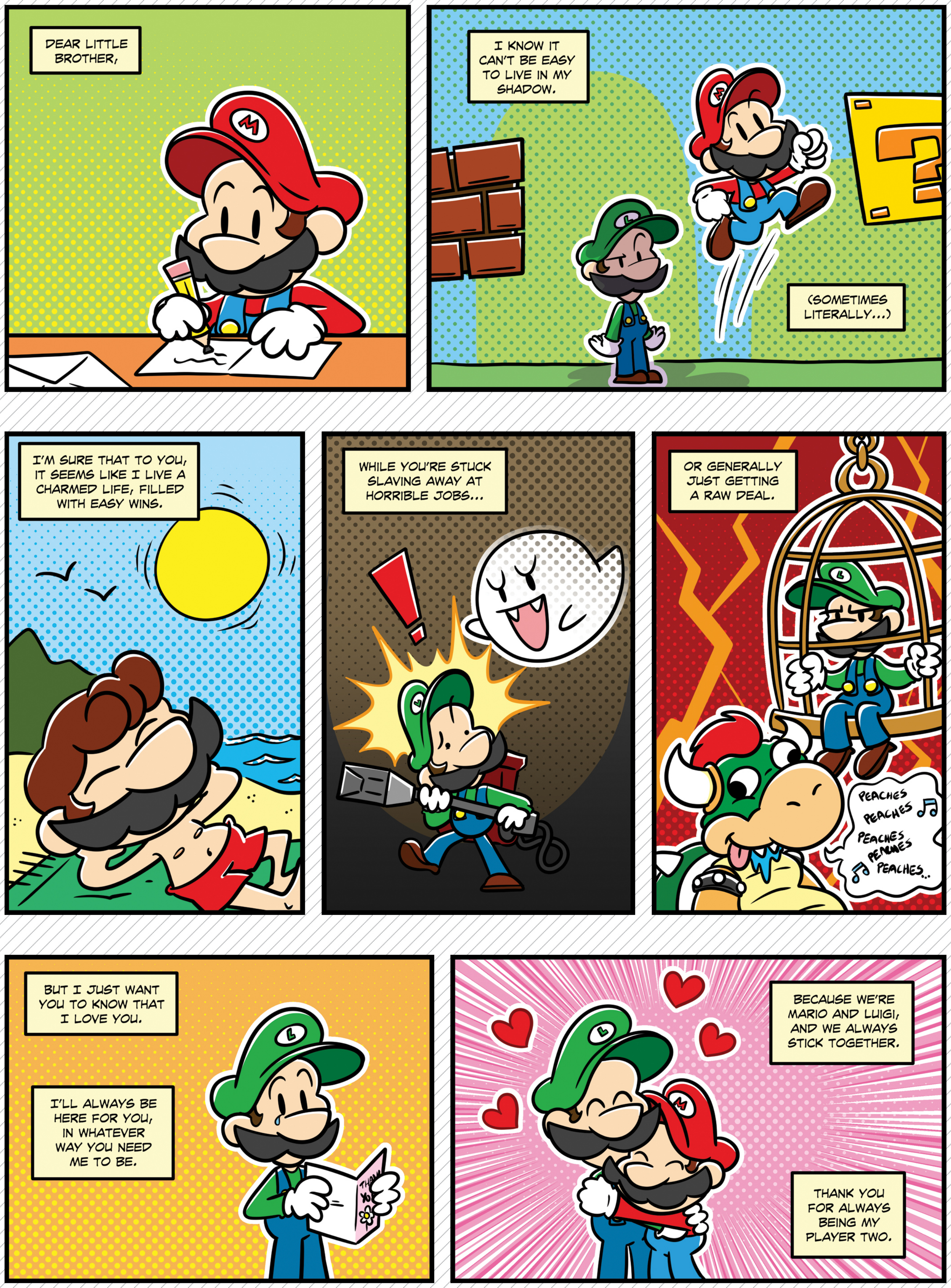
Chromatic's commitment to those two libraries of games means that these units won't support the play of Game Boy Advance cartridges, or any other past portables like the Game Gear or Lynx. But focusing on being as true as possible means the GB/GBC experience here should feel unparalleled. The developers at ModRetro even designed the screens to have the grid-like structure of thin negative space lines separating the pixels, which was a hallmark of the Game Boy Color's look.

Beyond the visuals, Chromatic boasts a magnesium alloy shell, rather than plastic, to be sturdier (but still lightweight). The screen is scratch-resistant sapphire crystal and the buttons all feel just right.

At least, that's according to the hands-on impressions of others I've seen so far. I have yet to hold one of these myself, so no verdict from me quite yet. But I wanted to go ahead and preview this product while it's still in its preorder phase mostly due to one last selling point: new games!

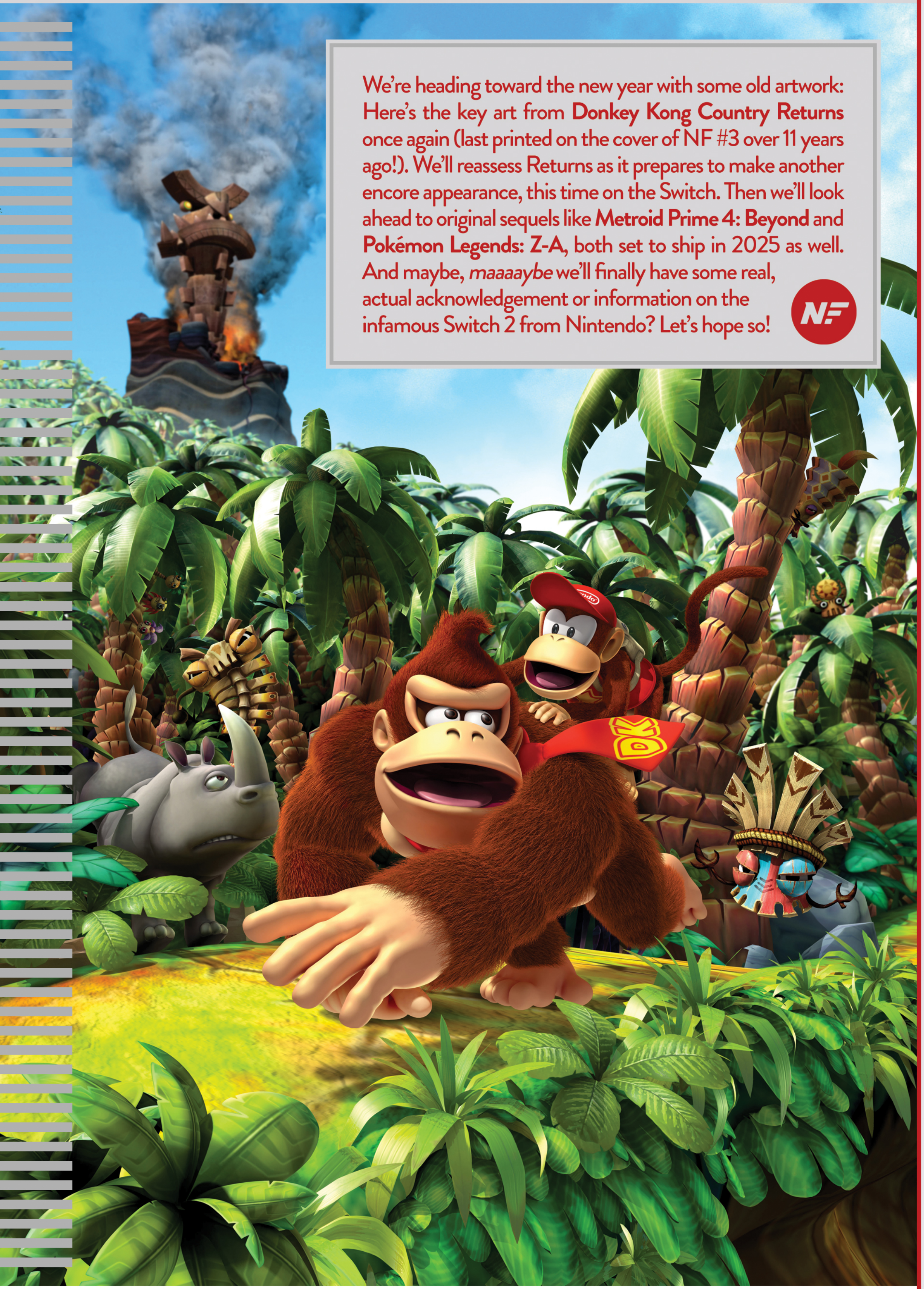
While products like the Analogue Pocket boast compatibility with all sorts of old game carts, Chromatic is supporting old titles *and* also publishing new ones! A brand-new take on Tetris was created to serve as the free pack-in title, in full partnership with The Tetris Company. Other titles in their launch lineup include an Ultimate Edition of GBC masterpiece Toki Tori, an epic, Pokémon-esque RPG called Dragonyhm and a playful puzzler named Patchy Matchy (which looks a lot like Tetris Attack). These games will all work on other GB units too – so you could purchase just some of the games if you aren't yet ready to spring for the system itself.

But if you are, Chromatic is priced at $199.99 and comes in several different colors. If you place your order shortly after this issue is published, your unit should reach your home in time for Christmas! **— LUCAS**



BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

NEXT ISSUE



We're heading toward the new year with some old artwork: Here's the key art from **Donkey Kong Country Returns** once again (last printed on the cover of NF #3 over 11 years ago!). We'll reassess Returns as it prepares to make another encore appearance, this time on the Switch. Then we'll look ahead to original sequels like **Metroid Prime 4: Beyond** and **Pokémon Legends: Z-A**, both set to ship in 2025 as well. And maybe, *maaaaybe* we'll finally have some real, actual acknowledgement or information on the infamous Switch 2 from Nintendo? Let's hope so!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #75:

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS HD

METROID PRIME 4: BEYOND

POKÉMON LEGENDS: Z-A

MARIO & LUIGI: BROTHERSHIP

SUPER MARIO PARTY JAMBOREE

RIVER CITY GIRLS 2: DOUBLE DRAGON DLC

ALARMO

CLOCK TOWER: REWIND

YAKUZA KIWAMI

YS X: NORDICS

SHADOW OF THE NINJA – **REBORN**

SONIC X SHADOW GENERATIONS

DISNEY EPIC MICKEY: REBRUSHED

THE PLUCKY SQUIRE

A SPECIAL **MEGA MAN** PRODUCT ANNOUNCEMENT

AND MUCH **MORE!**

JANUARY/ FEBRUARY 2025

THE THOMAS BROTHERS OF CHRISTMAS 1989

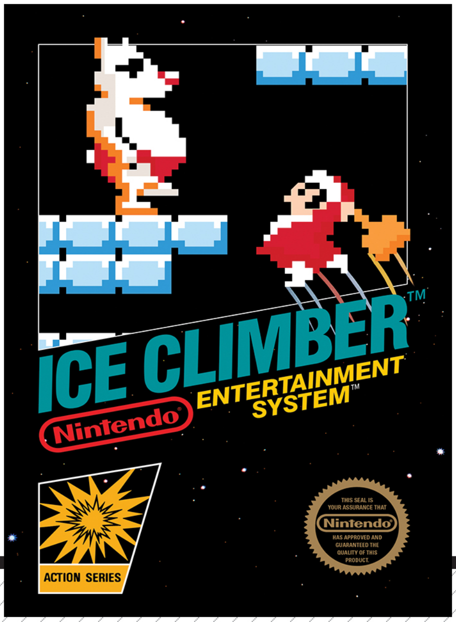
A GENERATION BEFORE my own kids inherited the Super Thomas Brothers title and began to fill their own childhoods with Nintendo gaming memories, I was a young Nintendo gamer and a brother myself – so I can't very well send this NF issue out into the world without acknowledging my own siblings! Luckily, I have a timely story to share.

This upcoming Christmas will mark the 35th anniversary of one of my most cherished childhood Nintendo moments. It wasn't the Christmas when we first got our Nintendo Entertainment System – that had been the previous year, on Christmas morning of 1988, when we opened up that classic bundle that included two controllers, Super Mario Bros. and Duck Hunt on the same cartridge, and the Zapper. (The original grey version, not the later orange recolor.) But Christmas 1989 is just as equally memorable in my mind, because that was the first day when all three of us each got our own brand-new NES game as a present. Not shared gifts, but to be individually owned!

My older brother, Josh, had turned 11 three months before that Christmas morning. He was in the prime of his NES gaming years already, encouraged by the fact that so many other boys in our neighborhood were also NES owners and were also around his same age. He got a gift that spurred on his friendships with those fellow video soldiers: Jackal, Konami's classic top-down action title best known for its great two-player co-op mode. It kept those friends coming back to visit our house again and again. (And Dan and I got to be Player 2 a time or two too.)

Speaking of Dan, his present also came from Konami: the original Gradius. We already owned Life Force before this point – due to its own two-player co-op mode, which my parents had hoped would help us play together (and it did) – but Gradius was a single-player shoot-'em-up. Dan was only 5 and a half at the time, so its difficulty was beyond his level of skill to begin with – but interestingly, Dan grew up to become an incredibly talented player of fast-action, quick-reflex games like the bullet-swarming Ikaruga. Maybe something clicked into place in his young mind when he first took on Gradius at such a young age, and that character trait took root and began to develop!

As for me? I didn't get a silver-boxed Konami title myself, but rather one of Nintendo's black-boxed NES launch titles that, by 1989, was already pretty old: Ice Climber. In hindsight it may look like I got the short end of the stick, since it would be wildly agreed upon that both Jackal and Gradius were better games that have aged much more gracefully. But me getting a niche, Day 1 title that introduced me to Popo and Nana, two characters who'd go on to still be loved and celebrated by Nintendo decades later through their continued inclusion in the Smash cast? What a perfect pick that was for me. Santa Claus got all three of these just right: He knew just what each brother needed! **— LUCAS**



PATREON.COM
/NINTENDOFORCE

/NINTENDOFORCE

WWW.
NFMAGAZINE.COM

YouTube
/NFMAGAZINE

@NINTENDOFORCE